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**Narratives of Crime and Disorder: Representations of Robbery and
Burglary in the London Press, 1780-1830**

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The Open
University, March 2017.

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a qualitative and quantitative study of crime and justice reportage of several London newspapers during two periods – the 1780s and the early nineteenth century focusing on two felonies: highway robbery and burglary, two of the most feared crimes at that time and used by contemporaries to assess the moral health of the capital. The press's reliance on unsolved crime reports provide a more realistic guide to the extent and nature of offending than court records. Reports show how these felonies changed: 'hustlers' replaced highwaymen and burglary became proportionately more significant than robbery. Press accounts were constructed to satisfy perceived reader interest, thereby proportionately exaggerating these felonies, their violence and special characteristics, providing a distorted image of crime. Newspapers were the main source of information and influenced public perceptions about crime making it seem endemic and normative. As the press became more professional, reports changed. The press, no longer content to remain chroniclers, produced longer, more detailed accounts representing certain types of property theft as socially and culturally problematic, such as juvenile offending and errant servants, creating criminal stereotypes and giving rise to beliefs in the existence of organised gangs, a criminal class and a criminal underworld, serving to demonise the poor as inherently deviant. Such representations found a targeted and receptive audience in the thriving urban bourgeoisie and middling classes, already anxious about political radicalism and social change, who were not only the principal purchasers of newspapers, but who were also disproportionately portrayed in the press as most frequently the victims of these two crimes. Furthermore the state, needing public legitimisation for its administration of criminal justice, found this in the burgeoning press, which, through its positive portrayal of justice as fair, created narratives of public justice and authority justifying the state's increasing powers.

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Robert Hopps,

Cambridge.

Table of Contents

	Page
Table of Contents	i
List of Tables and Figures	ii
Chapter One: The Representation of Crime in Print	1
Chapter Two: London, Crime and the Newspaper Trade	25
Chapter Three: Stores of Crime and Disorder: Robbery and the Press in the 1780s	67
Chapter Four: Narratives of Order, Public Justice and Class: Early Nineteenth Century Newspaper Reportage of Robbery and Burglary	138
Conclusion	200
Bibliography	213

List of Tables and Figures

	Page
Tables	
3.1 Column space dedicated to robbery stories, Jul/Aug-Dec 1780, 1785 and 1790	86
3.2 Newspaper space and levels of violence in robbery reports, Jul/Aug-Dec 1780, 1785 and 1790	87
3.3 Levels of violence in unsolved robbery reports, Jul/Aug-Dec 1780, 1785 and 1790	90
3.4 Violence according to gender in newspaper reports, Jul/Aug-Dec 1780, 1785 and 1790	95
3.5 Burglary and Robbery: Incidents and reports, Jul/Aug-Dec 1780, 1785 and 1790	107
3.6 Burglary and Housebreaking by month, Jul/Aug-Dec 1780, 1785 and 1790	108
3.7 Old Bailey convictions for burglary and housebreaking, Jul/Aug-Dec 1780, 1785 and 1790	109
3.8 Column space given to burglary and housebreaking in newspaper reports, Jul/Aug-Dec 1780, 1785 and 1790	110
3.9 Items stolen in press reports of burglary and housebreaking in newspaper reports, Jul/Aug- Dec 1780, 1785 and 1790	113
3.10 Use of violence in burglary/housebreaking reports in newspaper reports, Jul/Aug-Dec 1780, 1785 and 1790	117
3.11 Social status of victims in incidents of burglary and housebreaking in newspaper reports, Jul/Aug-Dec 1780, 1785 and 1790	118
3.12 Social status of victims of highway and street robbery in newspaper reports, Jul/Aug-Dec 1780, 1785 and 1790	124
4.1 Length of victim reports in newspapers, Aug-Dec 1816, 1821 and 1828	143
4.2 Levels of violence in newspaper reports for highway robbery and burglary, Aug-Dec 1816, 1821 and 1828	155

	Page
Tables	
4.3 Old Bailey trials for robbery with guilty verdicts, Aug-Dec 1816, 1821 and 1828	159
4.4 Length of newspaper reports for highway robbery and burglary, Aug-Dec 1816, 1821 and 1828	159
4.5 Seasonal distribution of burglary reports in newspapers, Aug-Dec 1816, 1821 and 1828	160
4.6 Occupations of victims of highway robbery and burglary in newspaper reports, Aug-Dec 1816, 1821 and 1828	161
4.7 Offender gender in newspaper reports of highway robbery and burglary, Aug-Dec 1816, 1821 and 1828	171
4.8 Old Bailey guilty verdicts for highway robbery and burglary: a comparative table, 1780, 1785, 1790; 1816, 1821 and 1828	190
4.9 Column space in newspaper reports about highway robbery and burglary: a comparative table, 1780, 1785, 1790; 1816, 1821 and 1828	191
4.10 Violence levels in victim reports for highway robbery and burglary: a comparative table, 1780, 1785, 1790; 1816, 1821 and 1828	193
Figures	
3.1 Newspaper reports of unsolved robberies, Jul/Aug-Dec 1780, 1785 and 1790 by Year	71
3.2 Newspaper reports of unsolved robberies, Jul/Aug-Dec 1780, 1785 and 1790 by Month	72
3.3 Prosecutions for robbery at the Old Bailey, 1780-1790	73
3.4 Breakdown of newspaper reports about robbery, Jul/Aug-Dec 1780, 1785 and 1790	81

		Page
Figures		
3.5	Methods of street robbery in newspaper reports, Jul/Aug-Dec 1780, 1785 and 1790	102
3.6	Nos of burglars and housebreakers in newspaper reports, Jul/Aug-Dec 1780, 1785 and 1790	116
4.1	Categories of newspaper reports for highway robbery and burglary, Aug-Dec 1816, 1821 and 1828	142
4.2	Incidents of highway robbery and burglary in newspapers, Aug-Dec 1816, 1821 and 1828	158

CHAPTER ONE

The Representation of Crime in Print

*Crime and the criminal eternally fascinate; they rather than politics supply the journalists daily bread, nor is this a particularly modern order of preference.*¹ GR Elton

Introduction

This thesis is a quantitative and qualitative cultural study of late-eighteenth and early nineteenth-century printed newspaper reportage concerning highway robbery (including street robbery), and burglary and housebreaking. It will address several core research questions. First, how informative are press reports of robbery and burglary about its nature, prevalence, characteristics, victims and the felonies perpetrators? Second, how did newspapers report these crimes and did this develop over time and, if so, in what ways did reportage change? Does the constructed nature of the reportage limit the usefulness of the accounts to create a better understanding of these offences? The thesis will carefully consider the pressures and limitations facing newspaper editors, and examine the various criteria they used in order to produce their reports of robbery and burglary. Furthermore the study will consider the ways in which press accounts of serious crimes may have impacted readers. What were the likely responses of newspaper readers to the numerous descriptions of felonies they read about, and can we say with any accuracy whether these reports shaped readers' perceptions about the nature and incidence of robbery and burglary? Finally the thesis will question whether crime reports fulfil any other function than the provision of factual information and entertainment. Did the press, wittingly or unwittingly, help to legitimise the state's power to punish property transgressors in an economically and socially unequal society?

The study will focus upon selected newspapers between the years 1780 to 1790, and 1816 to 1830, thereby adding a dimension that is markedly different to research studies of these offences based primarily upon court material. In recent years analysis of newspapers has assumed an increasingly significant place in the historiography of crime and criminal justice. Not only has the representation of crime in the press become an object of study in its own right, but newspapers have also become a major source for criminal justice history scholars. This study uses a broad selection of the London press to look at two particular

¹ GR Elton, 'Introduction: Crime and the Historian', in JS Cockburn (ed), *Crime in England, 1550-1800* (London: Methuen, 1977), pp 1-14 (p 1).

felonies: robbery and house theft, chosen to enable an interrogation of prevalent assumptions that newspaper representations of serious crimes were a major factor in the formation of contemporary perceptions of the nature and scale of criminality. Furthermore it pushes forward the recent trend to cross the traditional historiographical boundary between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, further breaking down any notion of a simple dichotomy between an earlier, customary and discretionary criminal justice system and a more professional and bureaucratic one that emerged in the nineteenth century.²

The thesis is based upon the understanding that newspaper crime reportage was one of the most important (if not the most important) source of information about crime available to Londoners at this time, and played a major role in the development of public perceptions about crime and the effectiveness of the criminal justice system. The press therefore played an important part in the formation of notions about a criminal 'class', the 'problem' of juvenile delinquency, errant servants, criminal 'gangs' and the changing nature of street robbery. Furthermore, newspapers did not simply record 'crime': they manufactured a social construction of crime for their readers. Since the press could not describe every instance of offending with every known detail, they had to be selective. They did this through the careful choice of which crimes to report, how much space to dedicate to each incident of offending and the use of language to describe offences. This study will carefully analyse the construction of the crime narratives within the selected newspapers. The thesis will also consider the representation of the victim in press accounts: do newspapers reflect the 'voice' of authority or of the victim? Whilst it is hard to state definitively, this thesis will also assess, as far as is possible, the degree to which press accounts reflected the nature and reality of offending. Furthermore the thesis will consider whether the press helped to legitimate the state's authority through its administration of the criminal law.

The study will also provide a comparative analysis of newspaper reportage in the 1780s and in the early nineteenth century. In what ways did the press change? Had it become more professional in its coverage? Did it report fewer crimes or did it emphasise the more violent ones? Did it report crimes at greater length and in more detail? The objectives of this thesis are to address some of the current and active research questions that concern scholars working in the field of criminal justice history. Using detailed analysis of newspaper

² D Churchill, 'Rethinking the state monopolisation thesis: the historiography of policing and criminal justice in nineteenth-century England', *Crime, Justice et Societies/Crime, Justice and Societies*, 18 (i), (2014), 131-152.

sources, combined with other sources (including the Old Bailey *Proceedings*) as appropriate, this thesis will pose and answer two *types* of questions: first, about property crime *per se* – its commission, how this changed over time, and how the public perceived this type of crime, and secondly about newspaper crime reporting. What can press accounts of robberies and burglaries reveal about the ways newspapers functioned, whether this changed over time, and how their influence might have been felt and perceived.

‘A vast increase of robberies’: Popular perceptions of criminality

In a period when some were growing increasingly prosperous, Oliver Goldsmith accurately judged the mood of the age when he wrote

The more enormous our wealth, the more extensive our fears, our possessions are paled up with more edicts every day, and hung around with gibbets to scare every invader.³

English society during the long eighteenth century enjoyed, and mostly tolerated, high levels of violence in everyday life. Underneath the apparent elegance and charm of the Hanoverian world, Roy Porter has noted that

[v]iolence ran through public and political life, as English as plum pudding. Force was used as a matter of routine to achieve social and political goals, smudging hard – and – fast distinctions between the worlds of criminality and politics.⁴

Therefore when contemporaries complained about the inordinate level of crime and excessive use of violence, the situation was undoubtedly socially significant and not simply a reflection of delicate middle-class sensibilities.

Thus when the following report appeared in the *Whitehall Evening Post* it typified popular feeling at times of anxiety about street robberies, in this case following the cessation of the War of Austrian Succession in 1749:

[t]he frequency of audacious Street Robberies reported every Night in this great Metropolis, call aloud on our Magistrates to think of some Redress; for, as the Case is now, there is no Possibility of stirring from our Habitations after dark, without the Hazard of a fractured Skull, or the Danger of losing that Property People are sometimes obliged to carry about them, which an

³ O Goldsmith, *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766), cited by J Rule, *Albion's People. English Society, 1714-1815* (Harlow: Pearson, 1992), p 226.

⁴ Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, revised edn., (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991), p 99.

honest industrious Family may be some Months, if not Years, working for again. These Villains now go in Bodies, armed in such a Manner, that our Watchmen, who are generally of the superannuated Sort, absolutely declare, they dare not oppose them.⁵

This newspaper article touches upon many of the themes that concerned contemporaries:

- The endemic nature of crime, especially footpad robberies;
- The daringness of many street robbers;
- The potential for violence and sustained injuries;
- The loss of valuables or valued items or money;
- The weakness of current policing methods to prevent or deter crime;
- The need for the state (in this case the magistracy) to improve the situation;
- The vulnerability of the ordinary citizen, especially those with modest wealth.

These themes occur repeatedly in the newspaper reportage of robbery and burglary throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

It has been claimed that the period from 1781 to 1785 was a 'halcyon' era for highwaymen following the end of the American War of Independence.⁶ The American War had prevented the export of transportees, and after the decisive surrender of the British at the Battle of Yorktown in 1781, unemployed and brutalised ex-soldiers returned to the streets of the capital. People started travelling in large groups armed with blunderbusses.⁷ Sophie von la Roche reported that when a group of ambassadors met outside London, their conversation was

[i]nterrupted by the fact that all these guests feared highwaymen, for they were all booked for the evening, and so had to leave for London much earlier than eleven; perhaps they needed their money for gaming, and hence could not afford to give it to the highwayman! So they decided to depart all together, as the robbers would hardly hold up four coaches at once.⁸

Horace Walpole was one notable witness to the depredations of highwaymen in the 1780s. Throughout 1782, he complained bitterly about the restrictions placed on daily life. In a letter to Lady Ossery in August he posed the rhetorical question:

⁵ *Whitehall Evening Post* 14-17 January 1749 cited by N Rogers, 'Confronting the Crime Wave': The Debate over Social and Economic Problems in England, 1689-1750', in L Davison, T Hitchcock, R Shoemaker (eds), *Stilling the Grumbling Hive. The Response to Social and Economic Problems in England, 1689-1750* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1992), pp 72-98 (quote at p 77).

⁶ F McLynn, *Crime and Punishment in Eighteenth-century England* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), p 80.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p 80.

⁸ S von la Roche, *Sophie in London, 1786*, translated and edited by Clare Williams (1933), p 235.

[w]ho would have thought that the war with America would make it impossible to stir from one village to another?⁹

And in October he wrote to Stafford that

I am sure, from the magnitude of this inconvenience, that I am not talking merely like an old man. I have lived here above thirty years and used to go everywhere round at all hours of the night without any precaution. I cannot now stir a mile from my own house after sunset without one or two servants with blunderbusses.¹⁰

Later in the month he noted to the same correspondent that

[t]he highwaymen have cut off all communication between the nearest villages; it is as dangerous to go to Petersham as into Gibraltar.¹¹

Walpole had had direct, personal experience of highwaymen. In 1749, James Maclaine and William Plunket had robbed Walpole of his watch, seals and sword in Hyde Park. Accidentally, the pistol blew up in his face, nearly killing him.¹² Even the Prime Minister was not immune from the depredations of the highway robbers. Lord North explained, with an air of weary resignation, that

I was robbed last night as I expected. Our loss was not great, but as the postilion did not stop immediately, one of the two highwaymen fired at him [...] It was at the end of Gunnersbury Lane.

It is little wonder that Walpole, the fourth Earl of Orford despaired

[w]hen highway robberies are arrived at that pitch to be committed at noon-day, in a public road, in the sight of several passengers, who is safe from their depredations? Sunshine is now no security.¹³

When introducing the Police Bill in 1785, the Solicitor General was clear that all night time travellers in London were well aware that the situation was sufficiently serious to require radical reform.¹⁴ The following year the Mayor and Aldermen of the City of London petitioned the king about the 'rapid' and 'alarming' increase of crime in their jurisdiction, as evidenced by a twenty five per cent increase in trials at the Old Bailey over the previous decade.¹⁵

⁹ *Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, 39 vols, edited by WS Lewis (Newhaven: Yale University Press, 1934-7), 33, p 353.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 35, p 367.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 35, p 525.

¹² C Hibbert, *Highwaymen* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967), p 13; G Spraggs, *Outlaws and Highwaymen. The Cult of the Robber from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century* (London: Pimlico, 2001), pp 184-5.

¹³ *Walpole Correspondence*, 33, pp 371, 476.

¹⁴ *The Gentleman's Magazine* 1785, vol 55, p 962.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1786, vol 56, pp 263-264.

Contemporaries clearly felt that crime was prolific, endemic and becoming uncontrollable for at least some of the time. They also thought that the policing and criminal justice system struggled to cope. But from what sources did they obtain their impressions? Undoubtedly personal experience, whether as victim or witness, would have been significant as would experience as a juror. The personal testimonies of family members, neighbours, work colleagues and friends would also have had a significant impact (although the effect of oral news networks is impossible for the historian fully to assess). It was also possible to attend trials or magistrate's hearings, and witness executions, a popular pastime among all social classes. There was also direct, personal experience of crime. Certainly members of the elite class experienced robbery and burglary: a study by Landau of sixty five metropolitan justices between 1768 and 1793 found that five had been victims of street or highway robberies, a rate of 4.4 per 1,000 people, a rate, Landau claims, is at least 250% higher than the experience of the average Western academic in the twenty-first century.¹⁶ On average, 2.2 of every 100 London justices of the peace were victims of a crime in any specific year between 1768 and 1793 as reported in the press or prosecuted at the Old Bailey. They were probably subjected to other unreported or unprosecuted attacks as well.¹⁷

It is impossible to gauge the level of 'real' offending: the lack of a centralised police force and the nature of discretionary private prosecutions means there is an absence of bureaucratically collected data about levels of criminality. Furthermore, the courts only tried an unknown fraction of crimes committed; the unknown 'dark figure' of unprosecuted crime makes it impossible to assess the likely impact of direct experience of offending upon contemporaries. Some evidence suggests that the levels of offending were not as high as some critics have asserted.¹⁸ Studies of diaries, provincial and metropolitan, confirm a relatively low level of personal property theft recorded by their writers and in many instances victims did not face a direct threat of violence.¹⁹ References to crime in Londoner's diaries are relatively sparse, and frequently not based upon direct experience

¹⁶ N Landau, 'Gauging Crime in Late Eighteenth-Century London', *Social History*, 35 (4), (2010), 396-417.

¹⁷ Ibid., 398.

¹⁸ RM Ward, *Print Culture, Crime and Justice in Eighteenth-Century London* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p 35.

¹⁹ P King, *Crime, Justice and Discretion in England, 1740-1820* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp 18-20; Ward, *Print Culture*, p 38.

or the experience of neighbours and friends. When they did record such offending, it tended to be for burglaries and street fights rather than for the more serious robberies.²⁰ It seems highly likely that whilst most Londoners had personal experience of low-level property theft (such as pocket picking), relatively few had direct experience of the more serious, sometimes violent, crimes of highway robbery and burglary. Therefore newspaper reportage of these felonies would have had considerable impact.

Property crime and the law

‘Crime’ is an everyday concept which needs to be understood in its specific historical context. Sharpe has defined crime as behaviour which ‘if detected would lead to prosecution’, but this ignores the vital role of discretion in law enforcement.²¹ Property crime has been the central focus of many scholars studying the history of criminal justice. Property crime was the most common form of offending, especially small scale theft.²² This thesis is concerned with two of the most serious forms of theft: highway robbery (including street robbery) and burglary/housebreaking. Highway robbery raised especial anxiety and fear since both property and personal injury, even death, were threatened. In 1785 William Paley argued that if these three characteristics were present in an offence, namely ‘repetition, cruelty, combination’, it deserved the most severe punishment. Violent crimes committed repeatedly by men in gangs, he believed, ‘endanger[ed] life and safety, as well as property: and [...] render[ed] the condition of society wretched, by a sense of personal insecurity.’²³ These attributes were often present in the crimes of highway/street robbery and burglary, offences which, because they were so serious, were regarded as felonious and punishable by death, rather than mere minor misdemeanours attracting a much lighter sentence.

Despite its ubiquity highway robbery was not in itself a specific criminal offence, but was part of the wider felony of robbery.²⁴ Michael Dalton’s much used handbook for justices of

²⁰ R Shoemaker, ‘Print Culture and the Creation of Public Knowledge about Crime in Eighteenth-Century London’, in P Knapper, J Doak, and J Shapland (eds), *Urban Crime, Prevention, Surveillance and Restorative Justice. Effects of Social Technologies* (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2009), pp 1-21 (p 2).

²¹ JA Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England, 1550-1750*, 2nd edn., (Harlow: Longman, 1999), p 6; C Emsley, *Crime and Society in England, 1750-1900*, 4th edn., (Harlow: Longman, 2010), p 2.

²² Emsley, *Crime and Society*, p 33.

²³ Cited by JM Beattie, *Crime and the Courts in England, 1660-1800* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p 148.

²⁴ J Sharpe, *Dick Turpin. The Myth of the English Highwayman* (London: Profile Books, 2004), p 41.

the peace helpfully offered magistrates a working definition of the felony:

Robbery [...] is properly the felonious taking of anything from the person of another, or in his presence, against his will, by assault in the high-way, or elsewhere, and putting him (*sic*) in fear thereby...²⁵

The definition of 'highway' was a broad one, encompassing pavements, footpaths and side alleys. Thus the crime of robbery consisted in the taking of goods or money, to any value, from another person, or in his or her presence, against their will, by the threat of, or the use of, violence.²⁶ The reach of the laws regarding highway robbery (and burglary too) depended to a great extent upon the construction put upon it by the courts, especially on the levels of fear and violence used.²⁷ The difference between a robber and a cutpurse (a type of pickpocket who cut purses from girdles), for example, was that the former feloniously assaulted his victim, putting him or her in fear, as well as stealing their property.²⁸ Generally speaking, if the felony occurred in a place of public access, the crime could be deemed a highway robbery. Highway robbery was thought to be one of the most heinous of crimes: it affected not only the safety of individuals, but also the ability to trade and travel, and threatened violence in a place protected by the king's peace.²⁹

Some highwaymen had a reputation for being 'polite' and 'gentlemanly', but there was always an underlying sense of menace. Thus d'Archenholz, a European visitor writing around 1787 claimed that these

[m]en are generally very polite; they assure you *they are generally very sorry that poverty has driven them to that shameful recourse*, and end by demanding your purse. In the most curteous (*sic*) manner; [they are not] in the least dangerous, as they never proceed further than a *menace*, never making use of their pistols, but in case of resistance.³⁰

Nevertheless, despite claims by contemporaries and highwaymen themselves, few were born genteel, and their claims to politeness were frequently proved false by their capacity to commit very unpleasant or violent crimes.³¹ Furthermore, many were involved in other

²⁵ M Dalton, *The Countrey Justice* (London: 1690), p363.

²⁶ Sir Leon Radzinowicz, *A History of English Criminal Law and its Administration from 1750*, 5 vols (London: Stevens, 1948-1986), I, p 637.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ G Spraggs, *Outlaws and Highwaymen. The Cult of the Robber in England from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century* (London: Pimlico), pp 104-5.

²⁹ Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, p 148.

³⁰ Radzinowicz, *History of English Criminal Law*, I, p 705. Emphasis added.

³¹ Sharpe, *Turpin*, pp 46-7; R Hopps, 'Highway Robbery in London, 1746-1755: the gentleman highwayman, myth or reality?', (unpublished MA dissertation, The Open University, September 2005).

decidedly ungentlemanly pursuits – prostitution, burglary, fencing stolen goods, and pickpocketing.³² Highway robbery had effectively ended by the beginning of the nineteenth century and the crime was transformed into ‘hustling’. As will be argued, both the demise of highway robbery and the beginnings of hustling were affected by changes to the urban fabric of London.

The highwayman was not the only robber on the streets of London. ‘Footpads’ were street robbers who operated on foot and without the benefit of horses. Whereas the highway robber worked on the principal roads leading into London, and the open heaths and wasteland on the periphery of the metropolis, the footpad robbed on the urban streets, often late at night. Typically, the street robber took more risks as he had more direct contact with his victims, and he lacked the benefit of a horse to make a speedy escape from the scene of the crime.³³ To ensure a safe and secure retreat, the robber needed to disable his victim, thereby risking the possibility of inflicting serious injury upon them. Their most common method was to waylay pedestrians and then escape to a ‘flash house’ in one of the notorious rookeries. Favourite spaces to rob included the area around Holborn and Tottenham Court Road, and retreats were located at Long Acre, St Giles, and Gray’s Inn Lane.³⁴ Footpads were more feared than highwaymen: they were more dangerous and brutal, and were quite prepared to maim, or even murder.³⁵ Although mounted highway robbery was in marked decline towards the end of the eighteenth century (the last recorded one took place in 1831), robbery on foot continued to flourish. It alarmed and frightened contemporaries, and periodically aroused anxiety among the public.³⁶ Robbery, mounted or otherwise, was especially prevalent in the metropolitan area, which offered the greatest temptations and rewards.³⁷ When contemporaries spoke about the state of ‘crime’ and ‘disorder’ in the capital, they invariably used robbery as a ‘barometer’ to measure the moral health of London.³⁸

Another felony that caused concern was burglary – breaking into a house at night. It not only threatened the protection and privacy of the domestic home, but it put residents at risk of violence in a situation where they could do little in self-defence.³⁹ The law also dealt

³² Sharpe, *Turpin*, p 49.

³³ D Taylor, *Crime, Policing and Punishment in England, 1750-1914* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), p 32.

³⁴ McLynn, *Crime and Punishment*, p 5.

³⁵ Radzinowicz, *History of English Criminal Law, I*, p 706.

³⁶ Taylor, *Crime, Policing and Punishment*, p 32.

³⁷ See below, ch 2.

³⁸ Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, p 149.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp 161-2.

severely with the crime's diurnal equivalent, housebreaking. Burglary had been made a capital crime before the Glorious Revolution, and capital penalties for housebreaking were added in 1706 and 1713 if anyone was put in fear, or property worth more than five shillings was taken (even if there was no one present at the time). In 1763 shops and warehouses were similarly covered.⁴⁰ Compared to robbery, these crimes normally had relatively low levels of associated violence, except perhaps when large gangs were involved in raids on the wealthy. The fear engendered by burglary and housebreaking lay in the violation of a supposedly safe personal space and the stealth, forward planning and professionalism of the offenders. Burglary especially attracted organised gangs in London where there were large numbers of wealthy, or at least, better off, households. Large-scale burglary also attracted gangs of experienced habitual offenders.⁴¹

House theft was often more profitable than robbery. For a robbery on the public road, speed and mobility were essential so there was often only sufficient time, combined with the carrying capacity of the thief, to take a few choice items and money from the victim. But a person's real wealth usually lay in their home: silverware, plate, fine glass, jewellery and other luxury items, and there was usually more time in a burglary to carry off the plunder in hand carts or hide it nearby to recover at a later date.⁴² Burglary was also a less risky affair than street or highway robbery: intruders could escape more readily, and there was less chance of watchmen or Bow Street Runners catching them by answering calls of 'Murder!' and 'Stop, thief!' London witnessed a moral panic about burglary in the early 1770s when the felony reached epidemic proportions: in 1770 alone, convictions for burglary at the Old Bailey doubled.⁴³ House thefts appear to have increased in the early nineteenth century, judging by the guilty verdicts passed at the Old Bailey and the numerical increase in newspaper reports about the felony during that time.⁴⁴

Thus there are very good reasons for studying the felonies of highway robbery and burglary/housebreaking. Both were amongst the most feared crimes of the period and breaking and entering with felonious intent was the most common capital crime.⁴⁵ Burglary

⁴⁰ Taylor, *Crime, Policing and Punishment*, p 87.

⁴¹ Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, pp 163-4.

⁴² DD Gray, *Crime, Policing and Punishment in England, 1660-1914* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), p 100.

⁴³ Taylor, *Crime, Policing and Punishment*, pp 88-89.

⁴⁴ See below, ch 4.

⁴⁵ McLynn, *Crime and Punishment*, p 87. Henceforth the term 'burglary' will be used to include housebreaking, unless indicated otherwise.

could be committed by anyone: from children and novices to experienced criminal groups.⁴⁶ Highway robbery, although statistically in marked decline by the end of the long eighteenth century, remains the most readily identifiable crime characteristic of the period. Street robbery with its unpredictable suddenness and capacity for severe injury or even death, was, and remains, one of the most anxiety-provoking of offences. Burglary and highway robbery were mainstream offences, crimes that contemporaries considered to be the most important ones when they discussed the 'problem' of 'crime'. These offences were at the heart of the daily business in the criminal courts. As Beattie has commented, they were

[t]he most serious and persistent threats to the peace and stability of society, and it was in dealing with them in this period that pre-trial procedures were elaborated, the criminal trial itself was transformed, and the main elements of the system of punishment underwent remarkable changes.⁴⁷

Literature review

The literature review will begin with a brief introduction to the general historiography of criminal justice history, and will then consider the specialist literature particularly pertinent to the period under consideration – 1780-1830. It will conclude with a review of the historiography relating to the press and crime.⁴⁸

Prior to the 1970s, the history of crime, justice and punishment was largely ignored by scholars and the work that was carried out by academics such as Radzinowicz was largely Whiggish and humanitarian in content.⁴⁹ However the 'new' social history, inspired by the

⁴⁶ Ibid., p87.

⁴⁷ Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, pp 7-8.

⁴⁸ There are a number of annotated bibliographies of criminal justice history covering the long eighteenth century. Examples include: J Innes and J Styles, 'The Crime Wave: Recent Writing on Crime and Criminal Justice in Eighteenth-Century England', *Journal of British Studies*, 25 (4), (1986), 380-435; P King, 'Locating Histories of Crime: a bibliographical study', *British Journal of Criminology*, 39 (i), (1999), 161-174; C Emsley, 'Crime and Punishment: 10 years of research (1): Filling in, Adding up, Moving on: Criminal Justice History in Contemporary Britain', *Crime, Histoire et Sociétés/Crime, History and Societies*, 9 (i), (2005), 117-138; BP Smith, 'English Criminal Justice Administration, 1650-1850', *Law and History Review*, 25 (3), (2007), 593-634; CA Williams, 'Ideologies, Structures and Contingencies: Writing the History of British Criminal Justice Since 1975', *Revue Francaise de Civilisation Britannique*, 14 (4), (2008), 59-84; D Churchill, 'Rethinking the State Monopolisation Thesis: The Historiography of Policing and Criminal Justice in Nineteenth-Century England', *Crime, Histoire et Sociétés/ Crime, History and Societies*, 18 (i), (2014), 131-152.

⁴⁹ Emsley, 'Crime and Punishment', 117; Sir L Radzinowicz, *A History of English Criminal Justice and its Administration from 1750*, 5 vols., (London: Stevens, 1948-1986).

social sciences and the desire to understand the experiences of the lower social strata (so-called 'history from below') led to an interest in the history of crime. The topic has increased considerably both in scope and in the volume of research carried out: whereas there were 205 books and articles published on 'crime and misdemeanour' between 1975-1979, this had risen almost four-fold by the period 2000-2004.⁵⁰ Scholars have identified several key foci for their research. One such focus has centred on questions concerning the relationships between crime/ class hegemony and industrialisation/ capitalism. Hay's class based thesis argues that the enormous discretion available at all levels of the criminal justice system enabled the ruling class to maintain their authority and protect their self-interests.⁵¹ Ignatieff has linked the development of the modern prison to emerging capitalism whilst others have focused on collective 'social' crimes such as smuggling, wrecking or poaching as a protest response to the new economic order.⁵² Most scholarship has focused on the evidence produced by the courts and the statistical possibilities they offer to answer some basic questions: how many offences were committed, who did them, under what circumstances, and what the judicial outcome was. The pioneering work of JM Beattie is especially noteworthy.⁵³ The figures suggested to Hay that demobilisation of troops after war led to increased levels of offending.⁵⁴ However King has argued that there is a fundamental problem in using indictments to measure changing rates of criminal activity. Increases in prosecution rates can appear distorted: if, for example, one in ten crimes were prosecuted, then a 5% increase in the proportion of offences prosecuted could

⁵⁰ Williams, 'Ideologies, Structures and Contingencies', 60.

⁵¹ D Hay, 'Property, Authority and the Criminal Law', in D Hay, P Linebaugh, *et al*s, *Albion's Fatal Tree. Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England*, 2nd edn., (London: Verso, 2011), pp 17-63.

⁵² M Ignatieff, *A Just Measure of Pain. The Penitentiary in the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1850* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), but see also his autocritique in 'State, Civil Society and Total Institutions: A Critique of Recent Social Histories of Punishment', in S Cohen and A Scull (eds), *Social Control and the State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), ch 4. On poaching, wrecking and smuggling see especially JG Rule, 'Social Crime in the Rural South in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries', *Southern History*, 1, (1979), 135-53; PB Munsche, *Gentlemen and Poachers: The English Game Laws, 1671-1831* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); JG Rule, 'Wrecking and Coastal Plunder', in D Hay, P Linebaugh, *et al*s, *Albion's Fatal Tree*, pp 167-188; Cal Winslow, 'Sussex Smugglers', in *ibid.*, pp 119-166.

⁵³ See especially JM Beattie, *Crime and the Courts in England, 1660-1800* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986); *Policing and Punishment in London, 1660-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); 'The Criminality of Women in Eighteenth-Century England', *Journal of Social History*, 80-116; ' "Hard-pressed to make ends meet": Women and Crime in Augustan London', in V Fish (ed), *Women and History. Voices of Early Modern England* (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1995), pp 103-115; 'Crime and Inequality in Eighteenth-Century London', in J Morgan and RD Peterson (eds), *Crime and Inequality* (Stamford, CA: Stamford University Press, 1995), pp 116-139; 312-315.

⁵⁴ D Hay, 'War, Dearth and Theft in the Eighteenth Century: the Record of the English Courts', *Past and Present*, 95, (1982), 117-60.

lead to a 50% increase in the number of indictments.⁵⁵ However the 'dark' figure of unknowable crimes severely limits the utility of official statistics. According to King, the long eighteenth century was 'the golden age of discretionary justice' where the decision to prosecute and a successful outcome were dependent not only upon the victim, but also peace officers, witnesses, justices and judges.⁵⁶ Figures suggest that crime was mostly increasing during our period, but it is unclear whether this was simply due to an increase in the proportion of property offenders being indicted. The limitations of statistics are evident in a crime such as highway robbery where there were relatively few prosecutions. Jeremy Pocklington's otherwise admirable dissertation on highway robbery is limited by his excessive reliance on judicial figures and disregard for newspaper evidence.⁵⁷ As Beattie has explained, there were 'so few' indictments for highway robbery in the Surrey assizes that 'little is to be drawn from their short-term fluctuation'.⁵⁸ Similarly Sindall's study of nineteenth century street crime is also critical of the value of statistics arguing that they are 'not [...] a reflection [...] of a phenomenon but [...] a phenomenon in themselves, a gauge not of 'what was happening, but of what people believed was happening'.⁵⁹

The period 1780-1830 is increasingly receiving the attention of scholars as a pivotal period in the history of crime. This was a period of considerable social and political unrest as well as economic transformation, and historians have shown interest in the impact these changes had upon crime and justice. It was also a period of humanitarian reform: capital statutes were repealed, punishments to the body reduced, prisons reformed and the first professional police force was formed in London in 1829.⁶⁰ The work of Hay and Ignatieff

⁵⁵ P King, *Crime, Justice and Discretion in England, 1740-1820* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), ch 5.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p 355.

⁵⁷ J Pocklington, 'Highway Robbery, 1660-1720: Practice, Policies, Perceptions', (unpublished University of Oxford M Phil dissertation, 1997).

⁵⁸ Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, p 158.

⁵⁹ R Sindall, *Street Violence in the Nineteenth Century: Media Panic or Real Danger?* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1990), p 26.

⁶⁰ On the decline of the Bloody Code and physical punishments see especially R McGowen, 'The Image of Justice and Reform of the Criminal Law in Early Nineteenth-Century England', *Buffalo Law Review*, 32 (i), (1983), 89-125; idem., 'The Body and Punishment in Eighteenth-Century England', *Journal of Modern History*, 59, (1987), 651-679; M Foucault, *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991). On the pre-reform police and the alleged 'newness' of the Metropolitan Police see especially C Emsley, *The English Police. A Political and Social History*, 2nd edn., (Harlow: Longman, 1996); R Paley, ' "An imperfect and wretched system"? Policing London Before Peel', *Criminal Justice History*, X (1989), 95-130; E Reynolds, *Before the Bobbies. The Night Watch and Police Reform in Metropolitan London, 1720-1830* (Houndsmills: Macmillan, 1998). On policing the City of London, see AT Harris, *Policing the City. Crime and Legal Authority in London, 1780-1840* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2004). The Bow Street Runners are discussed in JM Beattie, *The First English Detectives. The Bow Street Runners and the Policing of London*,

(above) has addressed some of these questions, and Gatrell has questioned the impact of the reformers in achieving change to the Bloody Code.⁶¹ It has also been claimed by Shoemaker and others that the era witnessed a decline in violence associated with changing concepts of masculinity.⁶² However John Carter Wood has shown that customary violence, especially among the working class, continued well into the nineteenth century.⁶³ In an influential essay Gatrell argued that this period witnessed the creation of 'crime' as an abstract concept, as a social 'problem' requiring a 'solution'.⁶⁴ The newspapers used in this study assist in charting the emergence of a commonly shared perception of 'crime' as a shared social 'problem'. One such 'problem' was the emergence of anxiety about delinquent youth which has been described in detail by King, Magarey and Shore, and many contemporaries believed in the existence of a criminal class and underworld, especially in London.⁶⁵ These concerns were, to a large extent, fuelled by press reportage. Hustling, as a form of aggravated pickpocketing by young males, had been practised for some time before the newspapers took it up and claimed it to be a social problem.⁶⁶ As these authors point out, the extent to which these problems were 'real' is highly debatable.

1750-1840 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) and D Cox, *A Certain Share of Low Cunning. A History of the Bow Street Runners, 1792-1839* (Cullompton: Willan, 2010).

⁶¹ VAC Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree. Execution and the English People, 1770-1868* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

⁶² R Shoemaker, 'Male honour and the decline of public violence in eighteenth-century London', *Social History*, 26 (2), (2001), 190-208; idem., *The London Mob. Violence and Disorder in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Hambledon and London, 2004).

⁶³ JC Wood, *Violence and Crime in Nineteenth-Century England. The Shadow of our Refinement* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

⁶⁴ VAC Gatrell, 'Crime, Authority and the Policeman-State', in FML Thompson (ed), *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750-1950*, vol 3, *Social Agencies and Institutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp 243-310.

⁶⁵ P King, 'The Origins of "The Problem of Juvenile Delinquency": The Growth of Juvenile Prosecutions in London in the Late-Eighteenth and Early-Nineteenth-Centuries', *Criminal Justice History* 4 (1993), 17-41; idem., 'The Rise of Juvenile Delinquency in England, 1780-1840: Changing Patterns of Perception and Prosecution', in P King, *Crime and Law in England, 1750-1840. Remaking Justice From the Margins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp 73-113; S Magarey, 'The Invention of Juvenile Delinquency in Early Nineteenth-Century England', *Labour History* 34 (1978), 11-27; H Shore, 'The Trouble with Boys: Gender and the "Invention" of the Juvenile Offender in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain', in ML Arnot and C Usborne (eds), *Gender and Crime in Modern Europe* (London: UCL Press, 1999), pp 75-92; idem., *Artful Dodgers. Youth and Crime in Early Nineteenth-Century London* (Woodbridge and Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2002). On the criminal class see especially H Shore, 'Criminality, Deviance and the Underworld since 1750', in A-M Kilday and D Nash (eds), *Histories of Crime, Britain 1600-2000* (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp 120-140; idem., 'Cross Coves, Buzzers and General Sorts of Prigs. Juvenile Crime and the Criminal "Underworld" in the Early Nineteenth Century', *British Journal of Criminology* 39 (i), (1999 Special Issue), 10-27; idem., *London's Criminal Underworlds, c1720-c1930. A Social and Cultural History* (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

⁶⁶ A longer perspective on issues surrounding young delinquents is provided by P Horn, *Young Offenders. Juvenile Delinquency, 1700-2000* (Stroud: Amberley, 2010).

The ability of the press to shape readers' perceptions about offending is best shown, perhaps, through the creation of 'moral panics'. David Lemmings has argued that the modern 'law and order' moral panic originated in the eighteenth century through a broad-circulation press, regular sittings of parliament and a middle class anxious about crime.⁶⁷ Moral panics were first identified by Stanley Cohen in his seminal study of mods and rockers, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*.⁶⁸ A panic involves an initial act of deviancy that is picked up by the media, its significance is exaggerated, explanations given and solutions proffered until the authorities agree to act. The press's role is to exaggerate the extent of the problem until the public are sensitised to the 'crisis'. Later the press lose interest and the 'panic' is over. Peter King has described one such panic in Colchester in 1765, when the *Chelmsford Chronicle* started reporting robberies and burglaries in the district and the authorities responded with improved policing. As King has noted, it is unclear whether the increased reportage reflected an increase in offending.⁶⁹ Cindy McCreery has described how, in 1790 a panic over the 'London Monster', a serial sex offender, spread through the capital, once again stimulated by media reports.⁷⁰ Although very different to pre-modern newspapers, research has frequently shown that in the modern mass media there is a link between reading about violent offences, and personal feelings of anxiety and vulnerability, and it would seem from King and Ward's findings that eighteenth-century papers could have a similar effect.⁷¹

Scholars have increasingly recognised the importance of print as a factor shaping perceptions of crime. Printed literature about crime encompasses a wide variety of literature: last dying speeches, criminal biographies (including *Ordinary's Accounts*),

⁶⁷ D Lemmings, 'Introduction: Law and Order Moral Panics in Early Modern England', in D Lemmings and C Walker (eds), *Moral Panics, the Media and the Law in Early Modern England* (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp 1-21 (p 2).

⁶⁸ S Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics. The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* (London: McGibbon, 1972).

⁶⁹ P King, 'Newspaper Reporting, Prosecution Practice, and Perceptions of Urban Crime: the Colchester Crime Wave of 1765', *Continuity and Change*, 2 (3), (1987), 423-454. An earlier moral panic has been described by Richard Ward, 'Print Culture, Moral Panic, and the Administration of the Law: the London Crime Wave of 1744', *Crime, Histoire et Societies/Crime, History and Societies*, 16, (2012), 5-24.

⁷⁰ C McCreery, 'A Moral Panic in Eighteenth-Century London? The "Monster" and the Press', in D Lemmings and C Walker (eds), *Moral Panics, the Media and the Law in Early Modern England* (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

⁷¹ See for example, P Williams and J Dickinson, 'Fear of Crime: Read All About It? The Relationship Between Newspaper Crime Reporting and Fear of Crime', *British Journal of Criminology*, 33 (i), (1993), 33-56; R Reiner, 'Media-made criminality: the Representation of Crime in the Mass Media', in M Maguire, R Morgan and R Reiner (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Criminology*, 2nd edn., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp 189-231.

broadsheets, ballads and newspapers. One of the first types of print to be studied was criminal 'lives', biographical pamphlets which often took highwaymen for their subject. They often represented highwaymen unrealistically lacking accuracy and psychological realism. Despite their obvious limitations, many popular writers such as Brandon and Hibbert use these pamphlets uncritically as a primary source.⁷² Gillian Spraggs has surveyed the printed narratives about highwaymen, but hers is principally a literary study.⁷³ Faller's valuable study of criminal biographies analyses some of the reasons for mythologizing highwaymen. The moral ambiguities of the stories permitted readers to place their own emotions upon the daring highwayman, and lacking credible personalities, narratives about highway robbers helped neutralise fears of being violently robbed as well as alleviate guilt over the exercise of the death penalty for property crime.⁷⁴ The suggestion that pamphlets expressed ruling class ideology or were an instrument of social control has been vigorously challenged by McKenzie, who has argued that readers appropriated texts 'according to their own perceptions, past experience and present requirements'.⁷⁵ Surprisingly highwaymen themselves have received little serious attention from scholars. Sharpe's monograph on Dick Turpin carefully unpicks the myths surrounding Turpin and other highway robbers.⁷⁶ Hobsbawm has described the highwayman as a social protestor or a 'social bandit', enjoying the popular support of the community, a notion heavily disputed by Spraggs.⁷⁷ Noting that a number of highwaymen were displaced butchers, Peter Linebaugh has controversially argued that robbers were pre-middle class critics of early capitalism.⁷⁸ However such fanciful perceptions can only be applied to the highway robbers of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Robert Shoemaker has shown that by the late eighteenth century, highwaymen had fallen out of popularity with the reading

⁷² D Brandon, *Stand and Deliver! A History of Highway Robbery* (Stroud: Sutton, 2001); C Hibbert, *Highwaymen* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967).

⁷³ G Spraggs, *Outlaws and Highwaymen. The Cult of the Robber in England from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century* (London: Pimlico, 2001).

⁷⁴ LB Faller, *Turned to Account. The Forms and Functions of Criminal Biography in Late Seventeenth- and Early Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

⁷⁵ A McKenzie, 'Making Crime Pay: Motives, Marketing Strategies, and the Printed Literature of Crime in England, 1670-1770', in GT Smith *et al*, *Criminal Justice in the Old World and the New. Essays in Honour of JM Beattie* (Toronto: Center of Criminology, University of Toronto, 1998), pp 235-269.

⁷⁶ J Sharpe, *Dick Turpin. The Myth of the English Highwayman* (London: Profile Books, 2004). There are also two unpublished theses on the topic: R Hopps, 'Highway Robbery in London, 1746-1755: the Gentleman Highwayman, Myth or Reality?', (unpublished MA dissertation, The Open University, 2005), and J Pocklington, 'Highway Robbery, 1660-1729: Practice, Policies, Perceptions', (unpublished M Phil dissertation, University of Oxford, 1997).

⁷⁷ E Hobsbawm, *Bandits* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969).

⁷⁸ P Linebaugh, *The London Hanged. Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century*, 2nd edn., (London: Verso, 2006), ch 6.

public, partly due to the development of newspapers which represented their violent behaviour rather than their allegedly 'gentlemanly' conduct.⁷⁹

Most newspaper histories emphasise the institutional development of the press and their political role rather than their content.⁸⁰ Harris and Lee have categorised the historiography of press history as stressing either the 'production side' (patterns of ownership, processes of production and distribution) or the 'supply side' (the relationship between the press and its readership).⁸¹ The content of newspapers as a valid topic for investigation in themselves has received relatively little attention. Traditionally historians of crime mined newspapers impressionistically for facts relating to specific crimes, but more recently scholars have come to believe that they are valuable texts in themselves. In his study of press readership in eighteenth-century Britain and America, Uriel Heyd concludes that 'the media actively shapes, rather than merely reflect, the world. Therefore the newspaper is no more passive, secondary or less real than other historical sources'.⁸² The work of King, Snell and Ward has shown that newspapers are composite, constructed texts where certain types of news stories are selected, prioritised, edited and presented for consumption. For King, the press opened up 'a vital repository of ways of thinking' about crime and justice for

⁷⁹ R Shoemaker, 'The Street Robber and the Gentleman Highwayman: Changing Representations and Perceptions of Robbery in London, 1690-1800', *Cultural and Social History*, 3, (2006), 381-405.

⁸⁰ L Werkmeister, *The London Daily Press, 1772-1792* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963); idem., *A Newspaper History of England, 1792-1793* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967); H Barker, *Newspapers, Politics, and Public Opinion in Late Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); idem., *Newspapers, Politics and English Society, 1695-1855* (Harlow: Pearson, 2000); J Black, *The English Press in the Eighteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1987); idem., *The English Press, 1621-1861* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2001); idem., 'The Press and Politics in the Eighteenth Century', *Media History*, 8 (2), (2002), 175-182; L Brown, 'The British Press, 1800-1860', in D Griffiths (ed), *The Encyclopedia of the British Press, 1422-1992* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), pp 24-32; E King, 'British Newspapers, 1800-1860', 19th Century British Newspapers (Detroit: Gale Cengage, 2007); A Aspinall, *Politics and the Press, c1780-1850* (London: 1949); idem., 'The circulation of newspapers in the early nineteenth century', *Review of English Studies*, xxii (85) (1946); I Asquith, 'The structure, ownership and control of the Press, 1780-1855', in G Boyce, L Curran and P Wingate (eds), *Newspaper History from the Seventeenth Century to the Present Day* (London: 1978), IR Christie, 'British Newspapers in the later Georgian Age', in IR Christie, *Myth and Reality in Late Eighteenth-Century British Politics and Other Papers* (London: 1970); GA Cranfield, *The Development of the Provincial Newspaper* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962); B Harris, *Politics and the Rise of the Press: Britain and France, 1620-1800* (London: 1996); M Harris, *London Newspapers in the Age of Walpole: A Study in the Origins of the Modern English Press* (London: 1987); W Hindle, *The Morning Post, 1772-1937. Portrait of a Newspaper* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1937); PM Hardover, *A History of the London Gazette, 1665-1965* (London: HMSO, 1965); D Griffiths, *Fleet Street. Five Hundred Years of the Press* (London: British Library, 2006).

⁸¹ M Harris and A Lee (eds), *The Press in English Society from the Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries* (London and Toronto: Associated Universities Press, 1986), pp 13-14.

⁸² U Heyd, *Reading Newspapers: Press and Public in Eighteenth-Century Britain and America* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2012), p 27.

contemporaries that was new and dynamic. Analysis of the discourses found in the texts is key to understanding the shaping of attitudes to crime and justice.⁸³ Both King and Snell acknowledge that it is difficult to ascertain exactly how readers received and understood these texts. Reportage was 'multi-vocal, sporadic, brief and sometimes chaotic'.⁸⁴ Gladfelder goes some way into helping us to understand reader reception. He argues that the immediacy of press reportage 'closed the narrative distance' between readers and the crimes themselves into previously regarded safe social spaces.⁸⁵ Accounts reconstruct crimes for readers, and these were deliberately designed to shock or outrage. As Gladfelder argues, they impact the 'reader's present experience and memory' and criminality becomes forever entangled with the everyday, which is made worse by the press's emphasis that the victim was totally unprepared.⁸⁶

Scholars have also noted the important contribution the press made to the emerging 'public sphere' in eighteenth-century London, where a self-conscious urban bourgeoisie developed which sought to influence politics. The public sphere was dependent upon new networks of communications, especially the press and the institutions of Enlightenment sociability such as the coffee-houses and clubs where newspapers could be read.⁸⁷ As Barker and Burrows explain, newspapers 'helped to restructure a reader's sense of time and space, creating an impression of engagement with a wider continuous drama of "public" events, within which their lives and communities took in new meanings and political participation became thinkable'. Furthermore, by the early nineteenth century (if not earlier), 'these processes were beginning to provide the basis for an emerging modern, democratic, consumer society, albeit one initially restricted socially and geographically'.⁸⁸

Furthermore, newspapers tended to represent a crime from the victim's perspective through the use of victim testimony reports, a character many readers would identify with, although the thesis will show that this feature declined in favour of court reports in the early nineteenth century. King, Snell and Ward have all argued that many, if not most people obtained much of their knowledge of crime from printed sources, the most

⁸³ P King, 'Newspaper Reporting and Attitudes to Crime and Justice in Late-Eighteenth-and Early-Nineteenth-century London', *Continuity and Change*, 22 (1), (2007), 75-112 (76).

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ H Gladfelder, *Criminality and Narrative in Eighteenth-Century England: Beyond the Law* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2001), p 11.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp 48-49.

⁸⁷ H Barker and S Burrows, 'Introduction', in H Barker and S Burrows (eds), *Press, Politics and the Public Sphere in Europe and North America, 1760-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp 1-22 (pp 11-13).

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p 4.

important of which was the newspaper.⁸⁹ Landau has unconvincingly challenged this thesis by suggesting that personal experience of crime was more formative in shaping perceptions about its incidence and nature.⁹⁰ The existence of moral panics and relatively low direct encounters with criminals would seem to devalue this argument. Ward has also shown how print culture impacted the making and administration of the criminal law in London.⁹¹

Crime reports in papers did not necessarily reflect either the incidence or the nature of crime. Snell found that crime reportage tended to be relatively numerically static over time, and Snell and King both argue that violent offences such as highway robbery dominated the papers. Under certain circumstances this may have encouraged victims to prosecute. As King noted, with the likely arrival of peace in 1782/3, 'newspapers may well have focused the general apprehensions of the propertied into more specific fears about the growing prevalence of violent crime, which in turn encouraged them to prosecute offenders more vigorously'.⁹² Press accounts tended to make crime appear normative – an everyday occurrence, violent and endemic. Research on the *Old Bailey Proceedings* by Devereaux and Shoemaker suggests that the *Proceedings* helped to promote a notion of 'public justice', showing the public the fairness of the court's decisions thereby helping legitimate the power of the authorities.⁹³ Due to the increasing demands of the City authorities for ever greater detail, the *Proceedings* were overtaken by their rivals, the newspapers, and this thesis will argue that the same ideological function was, to a certain extent, carried on by the press. Furthermore, papers carried a 'mixed message': the endemic and serious crime they reported helped inculcate a belief that strong government action was needed. Lemmings has shown how Henry Fielding endeavoured to create a concept of 'public justice' through his writings, justifying the actions of the law's agents and the law itself.⁹⁴ This thesis will suggest that, although the late Hanoverian press did not replicate Fielding, it

⁸⁹ King, 'Newspaper Reporting, Practice and Perceptions'; E Snell, 'Discourses of Criminality in the Eighteenth Century Press: the Presentation of Crime in *The Kentish Post*, 1717-1768', *Continuity and Change*, 22 (i), (2007), 13-47; RM Ward, *Print Culture, Crime and Justice in Eighteenth-Century London* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p 216.

⁹⁰ N Landau, 'Gauging Crime in Late Eighteenth-Century London', *Social History*, 35, (2010), 396-417.

⁹¹ Ward, *Print Culture*.

⁹² P King, *Crime, Justice and Discretion in England, 1740-1820* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p 165.

⁹³ S Devereaux, 'The City and the Sessions Paper: "Public Justice" in London, 1770-1800', *Journal of British Studies*, 47 (3), (2008), 559-580. On John Fielding's attempts at promoting public justice, see JM Beattie, 'Sir John Fielding and Public Justice: The Bow Street's Magistrate's Court, 1750-1780', *Law and History Review*, 5 (i), (2007), 61-100.

⁹⁴ D Lemmings, 'Henry Fielding, Moralist, Justice and Journalist: Narratives of Panic, Authority and Emotion in English Crime and Justice Reportage, 1748-52', forthcoming article in *Huntington Library Quarterly*.

nevertheless rarely criticised the law and its agents, and through its representations of crime showed the 'need' for strong government action and policing. When papers did point to the limitations of existing policing this simply served to justify the need for more effective state involvement in policing. Dyndor has argued that the highly formulaic execution reports in the *Northampton Mercury* provided an 'acceptable' image of justice and an infallible criminal justice system, just at the Bloody Code's point of collapse.⁹⁵ This was especially important in an economically and socially unequal society in an era spanning the Gordon Riots, the ideas of the French Revolution and nascent domestic radicalism.

Overall therefore it can be seen that scholarly analysis of crime reporting in newspapers is a relatively recent contribution to the academic field. Furthermore, no studies have been carried out to illuminate the specific offences of highway robbery and burglary and none have broached the traditional divide between the eighteenth and nineteenth century approaches.

Methodology

A blend of quantitative and qualitative methodologies is used in this thesis. The study is based upon a content analysis of highway robbery, burglary and housebreaking reports in eight selected newspapers covering six years in two decades. The months selected for detailed analysis were from August to December inclusive in the following years: 1780, 1785, 1790, 1816, 1821 and 1828. The papers selected for study were, for the 1780s, *The Times* (or *Daily universal Register* as it was originally known), the *Morning Post*, the *Morning Chronicle*, the *Whitehall Evening Post*, *World* and the *Public Advertiser*, and for the early nineteenth century the choice was *The Times*, the *Observer*, the *Morning Chronicle*, the *Examiner*, and the *Globe*. The selection objective was to try and ensure, as far as possible, representativeness: the years were chosen for the availability of newspapers and the months selected because they carried a variety of seasonal conditions that may have impacted upon crime rates, such as available daylight hours, climatic conditions of cold, rain etc. Warm summer evenings could ensure a plentiful supply of pedestrian prey for street robbers, and dark winter nights might have encouraged more serious robberies and burglaries. Newspapers too were selected to represent a range of types of journal: daily, weekly, bi-weekly, and thrice weekly. Whereas most are dailies, for example, the *Whitehall*

⁹⁵ Z Dyndor, 'Death Recorded: Capital Punishment and the Press in Northampton, 1780-1834', *Midland History*, 33 (2), 179-195.

Evening Post was an evening paper that was published three times per week and the *Observer* was a Sunday-only paper.

Because of unsatisfactory OCR technology, each of the selected issues of every newspaper was read and evaluated in its entirety without the benefit of keyword searching. Keyword searching not only produced a great number of irrelevant hits, but even with fuzzy searching options many cases of robbery or burglary failed to register. The majority of papers in the early nineteenth-century sample have not yet been digitised, and the journals were read on microfilm at the British Newspaper Library then at Colindale, London. In total this amounted to a very large sample to analyse: some 3,600 individual issues of newspapers consisting of 11,400 pages and 66,600 columns of small newsprint.⁹⁶ Most newspapers such as *The Times* were dailies with four pages and four columns per page. Such a paper as this provided 780 papers for research, with 3, 120 pages and 12,480 columns over both decades. Conveniently most crime reportage in most newspapers remained located on the third page, although there were exceptions, especially in issues that carried a higher than average crime news hole, (a news hole is that part of a newspaper not dedicated to advertising). This suggests that editors worked to some sort of rough and ready template when constructing their papers. Since the press sometimes used language inappropriately, reports of property thefts were sifted carefully to try and ensure that the crime in hand was truly a robbery (i.e. the victim was 'put in fear', the location was a public one) or burglary (i.e. not privately stealing or simple larceny).

Once the relevant newspaper reports had been identified, the data obtained was classified into categories and entered onto a database. The categories included:

- The date, time and location the offence took place;
- The name, gender, age, social status and occupation of the victim(s);
- The gender, estimated age and appearance of the offender;
- Any details surrounding the act of theft such as the level of violence used, attempts at self-defence, etc.
- The items that were stolen
- Any unusual circumstances surrounding the theft such as humour, coincidences, etc.
- Commentary by the newspaper itself.

⁹⁶ Michael Harris and Alan Lee have judged that 'a view of the Burney collection of pre-1800 newspapers in the [...] British Library is in itself enough to deter any but the most obsessive'. M Harris and A Lee (eds), *The Press in English Society from the Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries* (London and Toronto: Associated Universities Press, 1986), p 14.

The individual reports were also categorised according to their origin: victim/witness testimony accounts of unsolved crimes, reports of magistrates' examinations of suspects and witnesses, trial descriptions and execution reports. Levels of violence were assessed by using the following categorisation: (a) whether the threat was merely verbal; (b) the use of mild violence (for example the victim being struck relatively lightly); (c) the use of more serious forms of aggression with or without the use of weaponry and (d) murder or attempted murder. In addition, crime reportage in different titles was compared in terms of length of report and level of detail provided such as details of the victim/offender; location of the crime, violence used and property stolen. The data gathered was then entered onto two Excel databases for each of the periods covered under the above categories to permit detailed analysis and comparison. Despite the considerable amount of plagiarism between newspapers evident in the 1780s sample, there were still sufficient differences between the accounts that enabled a certain level of comparative analysis. Overall, all of the salient details of a newspaper report of a burglary or highway robbery were taken into account when constructing the databases and were carefully analysed to produce this study.

There were however certain theoretical considerations that had to be taken into consideration when analysing the crime content of newspaper reportage.⁹⁷ Original approaches to content analysis were developed by social scientists in the earlier twentieth century in order to measure social influences on readers. This approach was defined thus by Kaplan and Goldsen:

[t]he content analyst aims at a quantitative classification of a given body of content, in terms of a system of categories devised to yield data relevant to specific hypotheses concerning the content.

This methodology is problematic because it makes certain fundamental assumptions, namely that quantification alone would reveal both the purposes of the communicators as revealed in the content and the effect it had upon readers. Furthermore it was assumed that, by placing data in certain categories this would correspond to the meaning *intended* by the communicator and *received* by the consumers in the *same* way. Such an approach fails to take into account the socially constructed nature of press reportage. More recent scholarship has emphasised how the news was selected and represented to structure a particular form of reality, and that this 'reality' was directly influential upon media

⁹⁷ Much of what follows is based upon the excellent article by V Berridge, 'Content Analysis and Historical Research on Newspapers', in Harris and Lee (eds), *The Press in English Society*, pp 201-218.

consumers. Berridge herself perhaps makes the most useful contribution to the discussion from the historian's perspective. Although a paper 'presents a particular form of reality to its readership', readers 'decode' it in different ways. She believes that there is both a 'manifest' content and a sub-text that is 'latent', which is revealed by literary, linguistic and stylistic analysis. This thesis attempts to reveal both the 'manifest' meanings of a report – the nature and characteristics of burglary and highway robbery at this time, and the 'latent' meaning – that crime was common, normative, of uncertain causation, frequently violent and always unpredictable. It assumes – although this cannot be measured scientifically – that this message had some impact upon readers. Depending upon their life experiences, beliefs and the degree of credibility they attributed to the newspaper, most readers would probably have been alarmed, if not frightened by what they read, although a few may have taken it as unjustified scaremongering. The press's ability to generate moral panics in our period suggests that many readers were directly and adversely affected by what they read.

Structure of the thesis

Following this introductory chapter, there are a further three chapters. In chapter two, we will examine London and its surrounding area as a unique criminogenic environment, functioning as a centre for both temptation and opportunities to participate in criminal activity. Young people were perhaps the most prone to crime, and London was an important employer of often very vulnerable youngsters whose insecure status made them susceptible to offending. Highwaymen were particularly active in the area in the 1780s, and continuing urban and commercial expansion aroused anxiety amongst many people. Furthermore the capital was the centre of a burgeoning publishing industry and the newspaper trade, and the many crimes committed there provided a source of easy copy for printers anxious to fill their journals with exciting news. Londoners also provided a ready market where there was already a large, literate, urban middling and professional class, as well as the ruling elite. Chapter three is a case study of press reportage of robbery and burglary in the 1780s, when anxieties about crime ran particularly high and robberies were common. The value of crime reportage as a primary source for understanding the social realities of these two felonies will be assessed, and consideration will be given to the social construction of press accounts, giving special attention to the notion of 'newsworthiness' as a vital factor in editorial selection and presentation of news.

Chapter four will look at the press reportage of the same two felonies in the early nineteenth century, and it will note how the improved resources of the press and its

growing professionalism enabled newspapers to develop from simply chronicling criminal incidents to progress into thematic reportage, focusing on identifiable 'problems': the topics of errant servants and employees, criminal youth, juvenile delinquency, 'hustling', the existence of criminal gangs, class and underworld. It will consider the extent to which these problems were 'real' or were simply manifestations of middle-class anxieties stimulated by the press. In particular it will note that as highway robbery disappeared from the streets of the capital, burglary became the number one priority in the press.

The extent to which press reports helped form perceptions of robbery and burglary as endemic and normative is a theme running through both chapters. Furthermore the press helped to create narratives of authority and public justice which served not only to bolster the power of the state, but also provide a legitimate basis for it. There is a further meta-narrative in the thesis. The story begins with public disorder, the Gordon Riots, in 1780 and ends with order and surveillance by the creation of the Metropolitan Police in 1829. In between there are recurring problems of crime and further threats to public order arising from the French Revolution, political agitation and social and economic unrest, and an increasingly authoritarian government anxious to retain control. The newspapers used in this study show a similar trajectory: the 1780s sample chronicle the experience of the victim suffering the experiences of robbery and burglary during the crime- crisis years of that decade, whereas the early nineteenth century press more often contains the voice of authority in the form of 'official' reports of trials and magistrates' examinations. Finally, the thesis ends with a conclusion which will summarise its principal contents.

CHAPTER TWO

London, Crime and the Newspaper Trade

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the primacy of London as both a perceived centre for criminal activity and as a city which witnessed the birth of the modern newspaper trade. As well as providing necessary background for the investigation of crime reporting in the 1780s and 1820s undertaken in Chapters 3 and 4 respectively, this chapter will thus analyse the intimate relationship between rapidly changing social and economic conditions, fear of crime and the production and reception of crime news.

In 1780 London was not only the most populous city in Britain, it was also the greatest city of the European *ancien regime*. By 1815 it was the largest city in the world with, perhaps, the most diverse population.¹ It was also a metropolis of remarkable contrasts: between squalor and elegance, poverty and wealth.² It was an exciting, colourful and vibrant place. Dr Johnson's famous quip, 'when a man is tired of London, he is tired of life; for there is in London all that life can offer', was never truer than at this period in the capital's history.³ It will be argued in this chapter that contemporary views on the metropolis were divided between optimists and pessimists. The chapter will examine some of the reasons for the capital's reputation as the country's capital of crime. It will also assess the views of those who thought that the metropolis was becoming more 'polite' and less prone to outbreaks of serious crime. These perceptions were shaped by the physicality of urbanisation as well as the increasing divide between the 'haves' in the West End and the 'have nots' of the East End. The western sector of the city was largely a bourgeois or elite culture, based upon conspicuous consumption and service industries, whereas in the eastern portion a proletariat was rapidly developing. This was a significant factor for the ways in which crime was perceived in the capital, especially through that most bourgeois of eighteenth-century creations, the newspaper. This chapter will therefore consider changing levels of literacy and the development of the newspaper industry, with London as its major centre of production. Crime was a major component of the burgeoning press and the chapter will briefly introduce some of the themes developed in chapters three and four concerning the

¹ C Emsley, T Hitchcock and R Shoemaker. 'London History – London, 1760-1815', *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0).

² P Earle, *A City Full of People. Men and Women of London, 1650-1750* (London: Methuen, 1994), p 6.

³ www.samueljohnson.com/london.html

nature of crime reportage. Attention will be given to the topic of reader receptiveness to crime stories as well as the phenomenon of the 'moral panic'. Although written texts can have a multiple number of understood meanings by different readers, it will be argued that crime accounts tended to be read by the majority of readers in an uncritical way, taking the 'obvious' meaning of the story to be an accurate representation of what occurred. That readers responded in this way is suggested by the ways in which the media, past and present can generate moral panics, especially about violent street robbery.

The newspaper industry was largely based in London because the city had the ideal conditions for it to flourish: a large population, a demand for advertising, a literate citizenry, and relatively easy distribution. The press disseminated certain messages about the crime problem in the metropolis which, taken as a whole, were far from reassuring to the public, especially the elite and bourgeois reading citizenry who were the principal *purchasers* of newspapers, and thus the most influential class of readers.

I London as a criminogenic environment

London was always a major focus for violence and criminal activity, and because of the press it was perceived as such. The metropolitan area provided unique conditions in which crime could flourish which were not available in the provinces. This included a large built-up area surrounded by ever expanding suburban districts. These provided the numerous victims for robbers and burglars to thrive. Robbers were especially prevalent at night-time, and the entertainments provided by a large urban centre, together with a constant flow of traffic, only served to increase the numbers who were vulnerable.

London, according to Henry Fielding, seemed purpose-built for the criminal. He wrote

[w]hoever [...] considers the Cities of London and Westminster, with the late vast Addition of their Suburbs; the great Irregularity of their Buildings, the immense Number of Lanes, Alleys, Courts, and Byeplaces; must think that, had they been intended for the very Purpose of Concealment, they could scarce have been better contrived.⁴

Towards the end of the century, it was believed that the metropolis actively attracted those predisposed to a life of crime. Patrick Colquhoun described London as

not only the grand magazine of the British Empire, but also the general receptacle for the idle and depraved of almost every Country, and certainly

⁴ H Fielding, *An Enquiry into The late Increase of Robbers, etc. with Some Proposals for Remedying this Growing Evil* (London, 1751), p 116.

depredation, as well as for pursuits of honest industry almost exceed imagination.⁵

It was in the capital that the robber or burglar could find informers who would provide details about the routes of travellers or the homes of wealthy citizens, and, as important, fences to dispose of stolen property, as well as people who could help him if ever he or she was in trouble.⁶ Furthermore, informal controls, which were more prevalent in smaller face-to-face communities and which could help to reduce the levels of theft, were less effective in the metropolis.⁷

As *the* centre for conspicuous consumption, the metropolis therefore offered the best opportunities and the most temptations to an aspirant criminal.⁸ In the 1780s Von Archenholz was impressed by London as a shopping destination. Visitors were especially aware of the new fashion for large plate-glass windows, illuminated at night by numerous candles, where shopkeepers displayed their wares to their best advantage.⁹ Others stacked their goods in front of their shops or by doorways, inviting passers-by to physically inspect them: both practices only increased the temptation to shop lift.¹⁰ The capital comprised a large built-up area offering burglars opportunities to steal from the houses of the upper and middling classes, but there were also numerous factories and warehouses to rob. All the major roads of the kingdom converged on London and they traversed empty heathland and woods such as Shooter's Hill, Wimbledon Common, Blackheath and Hampstead Heath providing ideal opportunities for robbers.¹¹ Many types of people travelled along these roads offering rich pickings to the highwayman: stage coaches especially, but also farmers coming home from the markets, the carriages of wealthy individuals and the developing mail service as well as the perennially vulnerable single traveller. Although road improvements perhaps eventually worked against the interests of highwaymen by helping the patrols which were eventually mounted around the capital, in the short term turnpikes

⁵ P Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis*, 3rd edn., (London, 1796), pp xi-xii.

⁶ G Spraggs, *Outlaws and Highwaymen. The Cult of the Robber in England from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century* (London: Pimlico, 2001), p 89.

⁷ JM Beattie, *Crime and the Courts in England, 1660-1800* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p 14.

⁸ M Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p 261.

⁹ R Porter, *London. A Social History* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1994), p 145.

¹⁰ JJ Tobias, *Crime and Industrial Society in the Nineteenth Century* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), p 228.

¹¹ D Brandon, *Stand and Deliver! A History of Highway Robbery* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2001), p 60.

helped highway robbers by facilitating an increased number of stage-coaches travelling to provincial towns and cities.¹²

London also had the largest population. In 1700, London's population was around 600,000: by 1800 it had reached one million.¹³ In 1815 the metropolis housed over 1.4 million citizens.¹⁴ Many of these were not native born Londoners. London always depended upon inward immigration: predominantly young, often female and invariably vulnerable, seeking work in an exciting, vibrant and affluent city.¹⁵ Immigrants came largely from the Home Counties and from districts with links to the capital from coastal shipping.¹⁶ London acted as a magnet to those who were being displaced from the countryside, attracted by the employment prospects and wealth – including the needy beggar, fraudster and criminal.¹⁷ In the 1801 census fifty four per cent of Londoners were female, a highly vulnerable group economically and socially.¹⁸ They were employed chiefly in the domestic service, textile and service trades, and were susceptible to unemployment and sexual exploitation. In the often poorer districts of the East End, jobs for men were available in brewing, distilling, textiles, sugar processing and manufacturing and, of course, the booming port. Police magistrate and self-appointed statistician Patrick Colquhoun believed in 1800 that 120,000 men alone were directly employed by the port.¹⁹ In the West End, the growing importance of the London season to the gentry and aristocracy gave rise to a growing demand for servants, as well as luxury goods and services.

Employment, however, was precarious. The capital was especially vulnerable to variations in the trade cycle, compounded by outbreaks of war and peace and the predictable peaks (and depressions) in demand occasioned by the 'London Season'. Economic boom turned easily into bust.²⁰ There were also seasonal variations: in winter little employment was to be had in the building industry, brickyards or market gardening, and fewer ships entered the port. Furthermore, many were in service to the gentry and aristocracy, employment

¹² F McLynn, *Crime and Punishment in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 2002), p 69.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p xix.

¹⁴ C Emsley, T Hitchcock and R Shoemaker, 'London History – A Population History of London', *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0)

¹⁵ EA Wrigley, 'A Simple Model of London's Importance in Changing English Society and Economy, 1650-1750', *Past and Present* 37 (1967), 44-70 (49 n)

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ J Marriot, 'The Spatiality of the Poor in Eighteenth-Century London', in T Hitchcock and H Shore, *The Streets of London From The Great Fire to the Great Stink* (London, Sydney and Chicago: Rivers Oram Press, 2003), pp 119-134, 231-233 (p 124).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Schwarz, *London in the age of industrialisation*, p 9.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp 4-5.

that was notoriously insecure. Younger men might serve as apprentices who were no longer protected by the medieval guilds and were seen as a source of cheap labour.²¹ Faced with a rapidly growing population, master butchers in London struggled to satisfy the demand for meat. Increasingly, semi-casual untrained 'jobbers' were employed throwing experienced butchers out of work. A few butchers subsequently turned to highway robbery, either to survive or subsidise their businesses.²² As migrants unable to claim poor relief, the poverty experienced by those made suddenly unemployed was probably the major motivation behind most property crimes.²³

Around one-half and three quarters of those prosecuted for property crimes were from the lowest social classes. King found that amongst male defendants at the Old Bailey between 1791 and 1805, over 28% were unskilled or labourers, 34.1% were semi-skilled or skilled workers and a further 11.4% were employed in the semi-skilled clothing trades.²⁴ This socio-economic group were the most vulnerable to short-term rises in the cost of living, and always faced difficulties finding sufficient food or fuel. And in wartime especially, there was a strong correlation between increases in the numbers of indictments and annual changes in the cost of living.²⁵ Furthermore, periods of peacetime released ex-servicemen back into the community, and most appear to have migrated to, or been demobilised, in London. Numbers were large: Hay has suggested that 130,000 men were discharged in the spring of 1783, and in 1815, 350,000 demobilised men, mostly of unskilled or semi-skilled status, were dismissed and the labour market was glutted.²⁶ In addition, many of these had been convicted of serious offences, or were suspected of having committed crimes, and had been given a position in the army or navy as an alternative to formal prosecution. It would have been natural for many ex-servicemen to turn to highway robbery and burglary for survival. The precise figures of those turning to crime under these circumstances are open to question since the changed social and economic conditions of peacetime and ongoing press reportage about crime may have affected prosecutors' propensity to

²¹ MD George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: Academy Chicago, 2000), p 225.

²² P Linebaugh, *The London Hanged. Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century* 2nd edn., (London: Verso, 2006), chapter 6.

²³ Hitchcock and Shoemaker, *Tales*, p xxiv.

²⁴ P King, 'Immigrant Communities, the Police and the Courts in Late Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Century London', *Crime, Histoire et Societies/Crime, History and Societies*, 20 (i), (2016), 39-68 (55).

²⁵ D Hay, 'War, Dearth and Theft in the Eighteenth Century: The Record of the English Courts', *Past and Present* 95 (1982), 117-60.

²⁶ Ibid., 139; LD Schwarz, *London in the Age of Industrialisation: Entrepreneurs, Labour Force and Living Conditions, 1700-1850*, paperback edn., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p 101.

prosecute. This created a perceived increase in lawbreaking (which may or may not have been genuine), which in turn made prosecutors more willing to prosecute and magistrates to take a stricter line.²⁷ This suspicion seems to be confirmed by the 'crime wave' in London in 1748 when the advent of peace was met by the press with expressions of anxiety about an 'inevitable' increase in criminality. Subsequently there was an explosion of crime reports in the London press about serious robberies and burglaries coinciding with peaks in prosecution for theft at the Old Bailey.²⁸ Despite the importance of various factors influencing prosecutors, it nevertheless seems likely that there was a correlation between periods of exceptional hardship and the propensity of the poor to turn to theft on a larger scale, even though this is impossible to quantify.²⁹

During the long eighteenth-century, the capital had become increasingly divided into districts for the rich and areas characterised by huge levels of poverty. The East End was one district that was becoming an area of acute deprivation whereas the West End was probably the wealthiest single community in Europe, serving the aristocracy and the ruling elite. The City of London itself was the financial centre of nation and empire, whose wealthy population increasingly moved out of the dense urban centre to villages within one hour's walking distance, such as Hampstead or Highgate. City merchants and financiers took advantage of the newly established regular coach services in order to commute to work. Under pressure from population growth and commercial development, the metropolis grew physically, reaching into rural Middlesex and Surrey along the routes of the nation's major highways. In 1791 Horace Walpole quipped that expansion was destroying the sedan-chair trade, 'for Hercules and Atlas could not carry anybody from one end of this enormous capital to the other'. He suggested that '[t]he town cannot hold all its inhabitants, so prodigiously the population is augmented', and predicted that '[t]here will soon be one street from London to Brentford; ay, and from London to every village ten miles round!'³⁰

Such urban sprawl had consequences for the perception of London as the capital of crime and disorder. It seemed as though the capital was purpose-built for criminality. Mid-century magistrate and novelist Henry Fielding argued that the metropolis

²⁷ P King, 'Newspaper Reporting, Prosecution Practice and Perceptions of Urban Crime: the Colchester Crime Wave of 1765', *Continuity and Change* 2 (3), (1987), 423-454.

²⁸ RM Ward, *Print Culture, Crime and Justice in Eighteenth-Century London* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), pp 61-75.

²⁹ J Innes and J Styles, 'The Crime Wave: Recent Writing on Crime and Criminal Justice in Eighteenth-Century England', *Journal of British Studies* 25 (4), (1986), 380-435 (394).

³⁰ R Porter, *London. A Social History* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1994), p 99.

appears as a vast Wood or Forest, in which a Thief may harbour with as great Security, as wild Beasts do in the Deserts of Africa or Arabia.³¹

The image of London as a forest was a common one. In *A Trip Through the Town* the author described London as 'a kind of large forest of *Wild Beasts*' mutually destroying each other. The city was full of 'strange *Hurries* and *Impertencies*; the busy *Scramblings* and *Underminings*; and what is worse, the monstrous *Villanies*, *Cheats* and *Impostures* '.³² The trope of the forest suggested to the reader a sense of threat at a time of change and anonymity.³³ By the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, London (as well as the growing urban manufacturing centres in the north and midlands) were even more frightening places to contemporaries. It was a period of rapid social and economic change as the Industrial Revolution transformed towns and cities. Governments were faced with problems that they had not had to face before, and their knowledge and expertise at handling the situation was limited. Similarly, the multitudes of young migrants into the towns and cities were faced with unfamiliar problems which their rural, agrarian backgrounds had not prepared them for.³⁴ There were always certain districts in the capital which were notorious for criminality, and areas that the respectable would choose to avoid wherever possible. By the early nineteenth-century, there were five such neighbourhoods: Devil's Acre in Westminster, St Giles and Seven Dials; Saffron Hill and Field Lane, Holborn; in the east, parts of Whitechapel, Bethnal Green, Spitalfields, and Shoreditch, and to the north Grub Street, Golden Lane and Whitecross Street.³⁵ And it was in their early nineteenth-century newspapers that Londoners read about the 'criminal class' or 'underworld' that lived in these streets, striking at the heart of respectable citizenry. In 1811 the murders on the Ratcliffe Highway of seven victims in two incidents appeared to confirm Londoner's worst fears: that the capital was a violent and lawless city with inadequate policing.³⁶

London also offered entirely new ways for Londoners to relate to each other. Social relationships in the capital tended to be more casual and less deferential than they were in

³¹ H Fielding, *Enquiry into the Causes of the late Increase of Robbers* (London: 1751).

³² Marriot, 'Spatiality of the Poor', p 124.

³³ Ibid., p 124.

³⁴ JJ Tobias, *Crime and Industrial Society in the Nineteenth Century* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), p 42.

³⁵ H Shore, 'Mean Streets Criminality, Immorality and the Street in Early Nineteenth-Century London', in T Hitchcock and H Shore (eds), *The Streets of London From the Great Fire to the Great Stink* (London: Rivers Oram, 2003), pp 151-164, 235-238 (p153).

³⁶ PD James and TA Critchley, *The Maul and the Pear Tree. The Ratcliffe Highway Murders, 1811* 2nd edn., (London: Faber and Faber, 2000).

the countryside and small market towns, giving rise to the oft-complained sin of the lower classes 'aping their betters'. Individuals related to each other less in terms of acknowledged status position than in terms of functional role in a social transaction.³⁷ It was hardly surprising that a degree of anonymity seeped through the veins of a city comprising of 7,000 streets, lanes, courts and alleys and 130,000 dwelling houses.³⁸ As early as 1702 an astonished Thomas Brown commented that

London is a world by itself. We daily discover in it more new countries, and surprising singularities, than in all the universe besides. There are among the Londoners so many nations differing in manners, customs and religions, that the inhabitants themselves don't know a quarter of them.

-a viewpoint shared by Joseph Addison.³⁹ No Londoner could know the entire metropolis with its different cultures and characters.⁴⁰ The traditional notion of the parish had already broken down, and it was no longer a personal community where personal and direct relationships were maintained between fellow parishioners.⁴¹ The remarkable forgery case between Mrs Rudd and the Perreaus twins in 1775 brought to light the problem of who one could trust in a city where appearances were often (deliberately) very deceiving. Furthermore the case raised the fear that 'there were criminals not only in those nurseries of vice, the low dives and narrow turnings of the urban poor, but also in the spacious and well-appointed houses lining the West End's great squares'.⁴²

London was also a violent city, a place where one went in fear of one's life. In 1780, the Gordon Riots – ostensibly anti-Catholic, but targets also included Newgate gaol, the rich elite, breweries and Lord Mansfield, swept through the capital for a week, causing £100,000 worth of damage – ten times more than in Paris during the entire course of the French Revolution.⁴³ Fights and assaults occurred on and off the street, and the drinking

³⁷ Wrigley, 'A Simple Model', 51.

³⁸ *Public Advertiser* 22 December 1785.

³⁹ Thomas Brown, *Amusements Serious and Comical, Calculated for the Meridian of London*, 2nd edn., (1702), cited in R Shoemaker, 'Gendered spaces: patterns of mobility and perceptions of London's geography, 1660-1750', in JF Merrit (ed) *Imagining Early Modern London: Perceptions and Portrayals of the City from Stow to Strype, 1598-1720* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp 144-165 (p 144).

⁴⁰ V Harding, 'City, capital and metropolis: the changing shape of seventeenth-century London' in Merrit (ed), *ibid.*, pp 117-143 (p 140).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p 140.

⁴² DT Andrew and R McGowen, *The Perreaus and Mrs Rudd. Forgery and Betrayal in Eighteenth-Century London* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), pp 133-4.

⁴³ Porter, *English Society*, p 101. On the Riots see, R Shoemaker, *The London Mob. Violence and Disorder in Eighteenth-Century England* (London and New York: Hambledon and London, 2004); I Haywood and J Seed (eds), *The Gordon Riots. Politics, Culture and Insurrection in Late Eighteenth-*

clubs and alehouses were as characterised by their violence as well as by their alcohol.⁴⁴ Crime, and the fear of street robbers and highwaymen in particular was especially prevalent. James Boswell recorded in his diary for January 1763: 'I was really uneasy going home. Robberies in the street are now very frequent'.⁴⁵ When peace was signed with America, Sophie von la Roche observed that people went to social occasions in large groups with servants armed and ready to use their blunderbusses.⁴⁶

For many years the views of nineteenth- century sociologists Durkheim, Tonnies and Simmel about the association between urbanisation and criminality were widely accepted by scholars. They argued that 'urbanization contributed to the loss of community, to anonymity and alienation, to congestion and conflict, all of which meant a rise in criminal behaviour'.⁴⁷ In particular, the poor rural migrants attracted into an alien environment were less subjected to community controls.⁴⁸ However this viewpoint has been challenged by Lane, Tilly and Monkkonen who have argued that urbanisation created *less*, not more, crime due to factors such as a wider middle class, increase in private space and higher living standards for many. Their research was largely based on homicide figures which, they suggested, were declining in urbanising areas. More recently the thesis has been challenged by Peter King using English homicide statistics for the period of highest urbanisation (the late eighteenth-and early nineteenth-centuries). King found that murder rates were highest in large cities and adjoining districts subject to high levels of migration.⁴⁹ It seems likely that there is an association between murder rates and urbanisation when accompanied with immigration. A similar argument may therefore be appropriate for property theft in London at the end of the long eighteenth- century. Thus, London, a teeming metropolis, seen by some to be criminogenic (and certainly a locus for crime and criminals), was also a city changing rapidly, with improvements in the built environment and mechanisms of law and order giving rise to new forms of order and disorder.

Century Britain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); C Hibbert, *King Mob. The Story of Lord George Gordon and the Riots of 1780* reprint (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2004).

⁴⁴ P Ackroyd, *London. The Biography* (London: Vintage, 2001), p 483.

⁴⁵ Cited *idem.*, p 482.

⁴⁶ Sophie von la Roche, *Sophie in London* (1786) (transl. Clare Williams, 1933), p 235.

⁴⁷ P Knepper, *Writing the History of Crime* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), p 116.

⁴⁸ P King, 'The Impact of Urbanization on Murder Rates and on the Geography of Homicide in England and Wales, 1780-1850', *The Historical Journal* 53 (03), (2010), 671-698 (673).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

Nevertheless it was believed by some in the early nineteenth-century that London was becoming a safer and better place. By that time London had been transformed from a predominantly early modern city (albeit of a very large size), into a recognisably very modern metropolis. London was becoming more crowded as it continued to grow at a phenomenal rate. Between 1801 and 1831 Greater London grew from 959,000 to 1,655,000 – a staggering increase of 73 per cent.⁵⁰ This led to not only greater population density, but also to urban expansion as the capital began to hungrily devour surrounding open spaces in order to meet the demand for housing and commerce. The rebuilding of Westminster and Blackfriar's Bridges aided development south of the river.⁵¹ Ribbon development crept along the highway, urbanising semi-rural and rural parts of Surrey. By the 1830s north Lambeth, Kennington and Newington were largely built-up and developers had already reached Walworth New Town.⁵² According to Jerry White, in areas such as Clerkenwell, Stepney and Bermondsey, this was 'less a suburbanising movement [...] than a snail-like creep forward of the urban fabric'.⁵³ A newspaper in 1810 reminded its readers about the rapidity of urban development in the capital when it noted that between Blackfriars Bridge and the Elephant and Castle there had been only fifty dwellings a generation ago. It reminded readers that 'it is not forty years since highway robberies were frequent in St George's Fields'.⁵⁴ Urbanisation continuously ate into previously open spaces that surrounded the capital.

The development of such empty spaces made life much harder for highwaymen. Furthermore as the population grew, the roads became busier with pedestrians, commercial and passenger traffic making it difficult for the highway robber to practice his craft. In addition, the period witnessed the beginning of commuting by the emerging bourgeoisie, making once deserted or quiet roads much busier giving highwaymen fewer opportunities to hold up travellers. The hamlets, villages and small country towns to the north, west and south of the metropolis were built up rapidly by city men desiring to escape the crowded city. People were willing to travel relatively substantial distances: in 1808 a stockbroker committed suicide whose home was located fourteen miles away from

⁵⁰ White, *London in the Nineteenth Century*, p 337.

⁵¹ G Newman (ed), *Britain in the Hanoverian Age, 1714-1837. An Encyclopedia* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1997), p 69.

⁵² White, *London in Nineteenth Century*, p 69.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p 69. On the general development of the capital see PL Garside, 'London and the Home Counties', in FML Thompson (ed), *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750-1950, vol 1, Regions and Communities* 3 vols., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, paperback edn 1993), pp 471-539.

⁵⁴ Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, pp 160-1.

his business in Cornhill in the City.⁵⁵ The roads were always busy: before nine in the morning, clerks walked to work; between nine and eleven, the shopkeepers, lawyers and stockbrokers travelled in on horseback or in coaches, chaises and gigs, followed in the afternoon by gentlemen.⁵⁶ Given that return journeys were also needed, this ensured that the roads into the capital were always full of activity. Furthermore the development of turnpikes along the principal highways into the capital made it very difficult for highwaymen to operate unnoticed. Although some turnpike keepers may have been susceptible to bribery, this reduced the robbers' takings without necessarily guaranteeing his personal safety.⁵⁷

Not only were roads busier, they were also better lit further reducing opportunities for highwaymen and footpads to rob. Contemporaries were struck by the enhanced lighting arrangements introduced into the capital in the early nineteenth-century. Despite improvements, eighteenth-century public illumination had been entirely inadequate making London the worst lit capital in Europe. But by the beginning of the new century, a commentator wrote that the illumination provided by the city's oil lamps 'had a most startling effect, particularly at a distance, and to strangers'.⁵⁸ Thirteen gas lamps were installed in Pall Mall in 1807 and within five years the Gas Light and Coke Company opened its first gasworks.⁵⁹ Over the next fifty years the city's streets were upgraded to gas lighting, and it was this improvement that made the most difference to the effectiveness of publicly lit roads. In London, it was claimed that 'a light is as good as a policeman', which was able to protect the rich from the depredations of the poor'.⁶⁰

Comprehensive street lighting was, together with more professional policing, an outward symbol of the growing power and authority of the state, and its determination to combat crime and create order on the streets.⁶¹ In 1828 John Wade commented that well-lit streets were 'no inconsiderable branch of the police by guarding both persons and property from violence and depredation [...] Every improved mode of lighting the public streets is an

⁵⁵ White, *London in Nineteenth Century*, p 70.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p 70.

⁵⁷ JJ Tobias, *Crime and industrial society in the nineteenth century* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), pp 221, 230, 268.

⁵⁸ White, *London in Nineteenth Century*, p 18.

⁵⁹ DA Low, *The Regency Underworld*, 2nd edn., (Stroud: Sutton, 2005), pp xii-xiii.

⁶⁰ Joachim Schlör, *Nights in the Big City. Paris, Berlin, London, 1840-1930*, transl Pierre Gottfried and Dafydd Rees Roberts (London: Reaktion Books, 1998), p 66.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp 33-35; 58-59.

auxiliary to protective justice'.⁶² Further street improvements came with the passage of Michael Angelo Taylor's Metropolitan Paving Act (1817), so that by 1830 it could be claimed that the English capital was better paved than Paris.⁶³ Lighting and paving improvements added to public perceptions of better personal safety, thereby adding to a greater public willingness to travel the streets and public highways. General bustle also made the business of highway robbery and footpad robberies of the type familiar in the 1780s more difficult to execute. Road improvements, partially financed by turnpikes, also made horse and vehicular transport faster making it more difficult for highwaymen to stop potential victims. However lighting and paving improvements were restricted to the more affluent districts of the capital, principally the City and West End. It remained relatively easy for an offender to flee from an illuminated road and disappear into inky darkness.⁶⁴ Improvements to the social fabric of the capital also hastened the decline of highwaymen. In the 1790s tea-gardens and places of amusement were suppressed, in particular the 'Dog and Duck' and 'The Temple of Flora' which were, according to Henry Fielding's son, William, 'certainly the most dreadful places in or about the metropolis'. He claimed that the closure of these two 'infernal places of meeting' had contributed to the disappearance of highway robbers.⁶⁵ Francis Place recalled seeing 'two or three horses at the door of the Dog and Duck in St George's Fields on a summer evening, and people waiting to see the Highwayman mount'. And he testified before the Select Committee on Education in 1835 that when he was 'almost a mere boy' he saw the 'flashy women come out to take leave of the thieves at dusk, and wish them success'.⁶⁶

Alongside this changing built environment there were significant attempts at improving the policing of London. Following the failed attempt at police reform in the cities of London and Westminster in 1785, there were many piecemeal attempts to improve policing in the metropolis. The most radical change came in 1792 with the passage of the Middlesex Justices Act.⁶⁷ The legislation was a serious attempt to buttress the authority of the state and significantly improve the criminal justice system in the capital (although sensitive to the sensibilities of the City of London, that jurisdiction was excluded from the terms of the

⁶² Tobias, *Crime and Industrial Society*, p 199.

⁶³ White, *London in Nineteenth Century*, p 452.

⁶⁴ Low, *Underworld*, p xiii; White, *London in Nineteenth Century*, p 452.

⁶⁵ George, *London Life*, p 296.

⁶⁶ F Place, *The Autobiography of Francis Place* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p 81 n2.

⁶⁷ 32 Geo.III, c.53. On the act see Ruth Paley, 'The Middlesex Justices Act of 1792: Its origins and effects', (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Reading, 1983).

act). The act itself was, according to Hitchcock and Shoemaker, a government reaction to increasing radicalism and anxiety about the 'alarming increase' in crime evident to contemporaries.⁶⁸ The legislation established six 'police offices' north of the River Thames (at Great Marlborough Street, Hatton Garden/Shoreditch, Queen's Square, Shadwell, Westminster and Whitechapel), as well as one in Southwark, south of the river. (In 1821 the Shadwell office was moved to Marylebone). Each office employed three stipendiary magistrates and six constables.⁶⁹ By the beginning of the nineteenth century the capital enjoyed the benefits of seven new police offices, a river force and the services of Bow Street, the existing constables and watch, in addition to the policing agencies of the City of London. Their forces too had been improved. A patrol had been established there in the 1770s to combat criminal gangs, which had been regularised in the 1780s, and in 1791 this patrol had been uniformed and over a period of time was increased in size. By 1824 it comprised of twelve men working a day shift with the same number operating at night.⁷⁰ And by the 1790s the rest of London had an armed patrol from Bow Street with around seventy men specifically ordered to watch the principal roads into London at night.

By 1828 this force had developed considerably. There was a Horse Patrol, a Dismounted Patrol, a Night Patrol as well as a Day Foot Patrol comprising 24 men and 3 officers.⁷¹ Improved policing probably played an important part in the rapid decline of traditional mounted highway robberies. John Fielding had established a horse patrol in 1763 that had been highly successful in dramatically reducing highway robberies.⁷² The City of London had employed extra constables since the mid-1780s, and in 1799 the Court of Aldermen explicitly instructed extras to operate during daylight hours to patrol the streets to prevent robberies and pickpocketing.⁷³ The success of mounted patrols helped to show the public the advantages of informing the authorities speedily about their robberies.

⁶⁸ T Hitchcock and R Shoemaker, *London Lives. Poverty, Crime and the Making of a Modern City, 1690-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp 399-400.

⁶⁹ JM Beattie, *The First English Detectives. The Bow Street Runners and the Policing of London, 1750-1840* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp 164 ff. Cf EA Reynolds, *Before the Bobbies. The Night Watch and Police Reform in Metropolitan London, 1720-1830* (London: Macmillan, 1998), pp 85-86; D Philips, ' "A New Engine of Power and Authority": The Institutionalisation of law enforcement in England, 1780-1830', in VAC Gatrell, B Lenman and G Parker (eds), *Crime and the Law. The Social History of Crime in Western Europe since 1500* (London: Europa, 1980), pp 155-89 (p 168).

⁷⁰ D Rumbelow, *I Spy Blue. The Police and Crime in the City of London from Elizabeth I to Victoria* (London: Macmillan, 1971), chaps 4 and 5; AT Harris, *Policing the City. Crime and Legal Authority in London, 1780-1840* (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2004), chaps 3 and 4.

⁷¹ C Emsley, *The English Police. A Political and Social History* 2nd edn., (Harlow: Longman, 1996), p 20.

⁷² P Pringle, *Hue and Cry. The Birth of the British Police* (London: Museum Press, 1955), pp 166-68.

⁷³ Harris, *Policing the City*, p 75.

Furthermore, it maximised the benefit of turnpikes by turning them into unofficial police sub-stations.⁷⁴

Nevertheless the policing agencies were not without their vociferous critics. Although there was greater success at apprehending offenders, the newer systems also cost more to the ratepayers of the capital, and the improvements were not considered good enough to justify the extra expenditure.⁷⁵ Criticism reached a high in the aftermath of the Ratcliffe Highway Murders in 1811, when the police were viewed as largely incompetent after a series of bloody murders and burglaries led to a panic in the eastern districts of the metropolis.⁷⁶ News of the murders, and other crimes together with criticism of the competence of the police and criminal justice system to deal with the problems were, of course, disseminated by the press. Opinions were shaped not only by the events themselves as well as the cumulative effect of the reportage of large numbers of individual crimes, but also by the ways in which newspapers shaped and manipulated these accounts. By 1829, and the creation of the Metropolitan Police, the informed public may have come to believe that some system of reformed policing was desirable in order to protect private property and human life, as well as preserve order in society and meet the growing intolerance towards criminality.⁷⁷

By 1828 commitments and convictions (both nationally and in the capital) had been steadily rising since the end of the war more than a decade earlier. Most of the increase was in simple larceny. The most rapidly increasing crime rates were in the London area. This was partly due to the rapid rise in population, but even in the City (which had a stable or declining population) residents and police prosecuted more offences.⁷⁸ Nevertheless some contemporaries were aware of the difference between increased numbers of prosecutions and convictions and more crime. Alderman Matthew Wood commented on the situation in the City of London thus: 'I do not think there is a very great increase of crime; that there is an increase of commitments is very evident'. This was due, he believed, to more frequent judicial hearings which led to easier prosecutions. Furthermore, he

⁷⁴ Pringle, *Hue and Cry*, p 168.

⁷⁵ P Rawlings, *Policing. A Short History* (Cullompton: Willan, 2002), p 72.

⁷⁶ PD James and TA Critchley, *The Maul and the Pear Tree. The Ratcliffe Highway Murders, 1811* 2nd edn., (London: Faber and Faber, 2010).

⁷⁷ R Paley, ' "An imperfect and wretched system"? Policing London before Peel', *Criminal Justice History*, x (1989), 95-130 (96-97). Nevertheless all social classes (including the 'respectable' lower orders) perceived the 'new' police as an organised and deliberate attack on the liberties of the English; *ibid.*, 119).

⁷⁸ Harris, *Policing the City*, p 127

suggested, 'when robberies are committed, they are more frequently detected by the general activity of the police; and there are more commitments arising out of that cause'.⁷⁹ As Harris has explained, a 'self-perpetuating cycle [was] created, with the informal expansion of policing beginning in the late eighteenth century [helping to] explain the increase in crime feared by so many in the early nineteenth century; more police not only detected more crime but, just as importantly, represented an already existing support for higher levels of prosecution'.⁸⁰

Despite immigration and the capital's anonymity, London was still a highly sociable place to be. It was alleged to have had 207 inns, 447 taverns, 551 coffee houses and 5,975 ale houses in 1785.⁸¹ It offered 'an environment containing unparalleled opportunities for exchange with like-minded people, even if strangers'.⁸² The premier meeting place in eighteenth-century London was the coffee house, open to all (although only a few admitted women), and for a few pence it was possible to peruse a range of periodicals and newspapers in a sociable environment.⁸³ The newspaper was central to the layout of the establishment: the owner would leave copies of newspapers on large communal tables for customers to read. The provision of news, together with coffee and conversation, was one of their principal attractions.⁸⁴ In 1808 the tax on coffee was reduced and the drink became a firm favourite for breakfast for artisans. According to Francis Place, coffee-shops were a 'means of great improvement to working people'.⁸⁵ Even the public streets were sociable spaces: they were not simply an aid to movement, but 'they were a stage upon which people acted'.⁸⁶ People identified with their community, their neighbourhood and felt responsible for maintaining order within it.⁸⁷ The majority of Londoners did not necessarily identify with the capital as an organic whole: they did not, for example, travel much across the metropolis unless they were very wealthy or very poor and looking for work. But they identified and cared for their own neighbourhood.⁸⁸ Neighbourliness remained a feature of life in the capital because so many people lived close to each other in

⁷⁹ Ibid., p 126.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p 155

⁸¹ 'A View of the Number of Inhabitants and Consumption of Provisions in London from a late Calculation', *Public Advertiser* 22 December 1785.

⁸² Marriott, 'Spatiality of the Poor', pp 122-23.

⁸³ R Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991), pp 226-7.

⁸⁴ M Ellis, *The Coffee House. A Cultural History* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2004), pp 68-69.

⁸⁵ George, *London Life*, pp 296-7.

⁸⁶ T Hitchcock and H Shore, 'Introduction', *Streets of London*, p 3.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p 8.

⁸⁸ Shoemaker, 'Gendered spaces', pp 160-1.

tightly packed alleys and courts; in certain parishes perhaps ninety five houses were squashed into a single acre. Houses were usually shared with lodgers and were overcrowded and walls were thin and private lives were often open to public view.⁸⁹ News and gossip travelled quickly down an urban street, and newsvendors and bellmen cried out the news.⁹⁰ This was one way of hearing news about criminals and criminal activity, but by its very nature it has left little historical record.

Thus over the period 1780-1830, London was being rapidly transformed socially and economically. The capital possessed a criminogenic environment: as the largest urban centre it was an attractive focal point for criminal activities, and was perceived as such, especially through the agency of the press. Some commentators thought that the metropolis was improving, but changes to the urban fabric simply meant that highway robbery was replaced by hustling, a form of offending more suited to the new environment. Citizens were becoming more aware of what was happening in their city and nation through the newspaper press, which was becoming their main source of information about offenders and offending. Improvements in policing brought more attention to criminality as more offences were solved. The metropolis was, perhaps, less anonymous and more neighbourly than once thought, but nevertheless it was a major location in which offenders could operate with a degree of impunity.

London and the Newspaper Trade

An understanding of the developing print culture is essential to both an understanding of eighteenth-century society in general and the impact of crime accounts in the media in particular. There was a sudden eruption of print in the early eighteenth-century which continued throughout the period, not only in the traditional formats of book, broadside, ballad and pamphlet but in other genres too – the century invented both the modern novel and newspaper, which was probably the most influential form of printed media.⁹¹ Newspapers came to be the dominant news medium from mid-century onwards. The Ordinary's *Accounts* (biographies of condemned criminals written by the chaplain of Newgate gaol), lost their market as middling and upper class audiences lost interest in

⁸⁹ P Griffiths, *Lost Londons. Change, Crime and Control in the Capital City, 1550-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp 70-1.

⁹⁰ PJ Corfield, 'Walking the City Streets. The Urban Odyssey in Eighteenth-Century England', *Journal of Urban History* 16 (2), (1990), 132-174 (141-42).

⁹¹ R Shoemaker, 'Print Culture and the Creation of Public Knowledge about Crime in 18th-century England', in P Knepper, J Doak, and J Shephard (eds), *Urban Crime Prevention, Surveillance and Restorative Justice. Effects of Social Technologies* (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2009), pp 1-21 (p 1).

plebeian criminals, and grew to favour offenders of higher social status such as forgers.⁹⁸ In addition, the Old Bailey *Proceedings* became too long and detailed for popular taste, and newspapers quickly filled the vacuum.⁹⁹ As Jeremy Black has explained, '[t]he culture of print accustomed part of the population to experience information and news through publications, lessening the role and sway of oral culture.'¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, newspapers in particular, were populist: they appealed to people *en masse*.¹⁰¹ The long eighteenth-century witnessed a plethora of printed material about the metropolis including maps, prints, guide books, newspapers, novels, periodicals, poetry and pamphlets on topics pertinent to life in the capital. Their contents discussed the joys and dangers, the benefits and snares of urban life.¹⁰² JF Merritt has suggested that, with London's continuing urban expansion, 'for many people, parts of the city may have been becoming places that they read about, rather than places with which they had some tenuous personal link'.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, guide books, despite their claims to knowledge, added caveats stating that the metropolis is unknowable in its entirety, and Frances Burney's novels *Evelina* (1778) and *Cecilia* (1780) emphasize just how dangerous unknown London could be.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore there was not a single London: experiences and perceptions changed according to class, cultural experiences, geographical origins and locations, standards of living and expectations. Cities exist in the mind as well as in brick.¹⁰⁵ Londoners possessed 'mental maps' based upon their own experiences (and what they had read about) as well as the stories of family, friends and neighbours. These 'maps' warned people about areas where they needed to take care and districts to avoid.¹⁰⁶ Crucially by the eighteenth century, mental maps were also being formed by print aided by the greater literacy levels to be found in London.

Assessing literacy levels in the long eighteenth-century is difficult and scholars are not

⁹⁸ McKenzie, 'From True Confessions to True Reporting? The Decline and Fall of the Ordinary's Account', *The London Journal*, 30 (i), (2005), 55-70.

⁹⁹ S Devereaux, 'From Sessions to Newspaper? Criminal Trial Reporting, the Nature of Crime and the London Press, 1770-1800', *The London Journal*, 32 (i), (2007), 1-27.

¹⁰⁰ J Black, *A Subject for Taste, Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (London and New York: Hambledon and London, 2005), p 169.

¹⁰¹ H Barker, 'England, 1760-1815', in H Barker and S Burrows, (eds), *Press, Politics and the Public Sphere in Europe and North America, 1760-1820* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp 93-112 (p 94).

¹⁰² *Walking The Streets of Eighteenth-Century London: John Gay's 'Trivia'* eds C Brant and SE Whyman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p5.

¹⁰³ JF Merritt, 'Perceptions and Portrayals of London, 1598-1720', in JF Merritt (ed), *Imagining Early Modern London: Perceptions and Portrayals of the City from Stow to Strype, 1598-1720* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p9.

¹⁰⁴ C Wall, ' "At Shakespeare's Head, Over-Against Catharine-Street in the Strand": Forms of Address in London Streets', in Hitchcock and Shore, *Streets of London*, pp 10-26, 215-217 (p 17).

¹⁰⁵ Griffiths, *Lost Londons*, p xiii.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp 76-77.

agreed upon a basic definition of the term. But by 1750 probably 60% of males could read and write and 40-50% per cent of women were readers to a certain extent. The continuously enlarging world of print encouraged greater literacy levels in the later eighteenth century: a sample of applicants applying for relief at St Clement Danes in 1752-4 shows that 67% of men and 31% of women could sign their names, but by 1785-92 a similar sample showed 78% and 38% per cent respectively.¹⁰⁷ In 1838-9 in London marks as substitutes for signatures were made by only 12% of grooms and 24% of brides: the national average was 33% and 49% per cent respectively.¹⁰⁸ These figures suggest that not only were literacy levels higher in the capital than elsewhere, but that also they were continuing to increase over the course of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth- centuries. Furthermore, they probably underestimate the ability to read since many more could read than write, and more were able to read print than handwriting.¹⁰⁹ The need for literacy and the opportunities to obtain it were higher in London than elsewhere. There were many more schools, often provided by evangelicals keen to inculcate Bible reading in the lower classes.¹¹⁰ Employment requirements in a non-agrarian society and the need to read street signs may have provided the motivation to seek out this ability. Indeed Cressy believes that by the early eighteenth-century almost all the commercial classes in London were literate.¹¹¹ Stimulus was also provided by the emergence of two distinctly eighteenth-century literary forms: the newspaper and the novel. It became an embarrassment to self-esteem and public reputation to be illiterate.¹¹² Reading has been described as 'one of the great collective obsessions of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century English society'.¹¹³ The ability to read both exposed the mind to reality as well as opening the imaginative capacity, and through rogue literature many previously unknown criminals were first revealed to the citizenry of the capita. However, through its relatively easy availability, regularity of production and the representation of numerous instances of law breaking, the newspaper was able to influence Londoner's perceptions of crime and criminals more fully than the pamphlets and broadsides

¹⁰⁷ White, *London in the Eighteenth Century*, p 253.

¹⁰⁸ Wrigley, 'A Simple Model', p 51.

¹⁰⁹ K Thomas, 'The Meaning of Literacy in Early Modern England', in G Baumann, *The Written Word. Literacy in Transition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), pp97-131 (pp 100,102).

¹¹⁰ R and L Adkins, *Eavesdropping on Jane Austen's England. How our Ancestors Lived Two Centuries Ago* (London: Little, Brown, 2013), p.68.

¹¹¹ D Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order* (London: 1975), p.154.

¹¹² D Cressy, 'Literacy in context: meaning and measurement in early modern England', in D Cressy, *Society and Culture in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2003), pp 305-319 (p 308).

¹¹³ D Allan, *A Nation of Readers. The Lending Library in Georgian England* (London: The British Library, 2008), p1.

were able to.¹¹⁴

The London newspaper trade developed through the collapse of the Licensing Act in 1695 which had insisted on pre-publication censorship.¹¹⁵ London offered unique opportunities for the industry to develop: it was the largest city in the realm with a huge demand for cheap reading matter. Advertising and distribution were relatively easy. The rapid growth of the press can be measured by the sale of newspaper stamps: from a sale of 9,464,790 in 1760, this had risen to 12,680,000 by 1775 and 16,000,000 by 1801. By 1816 over 22,000,000 stamped newspapers were being sold nationwide.¹¹⁶ This is also reflected in the growth in the number of titles: whereas in 1712 there had been twelve London newspapers, by 1783 there were nine dailies and ten bi- or tri-weeklies and by 1790 there were thirteen morning, one evening, seven tri-weekly and two bi-weekly newspapers.¹¹⁷ In 1813 the capital enjoyed fifty six papers: eight morning, seven evening, seven alternate evenings, sixteen Sunday and eighteen weekly journals.¹¹⁸ Actual sales figures are hard to estimate since the appropriate Stamp Office records no longer exist but daily newspapers probably achieved the highest sales. Newspapers had to sell at least 1500 copies each day to remain financially viable, but many probably exceeded this target.¹¹⁹ The editor of the *Morning Post* in 1778, Reverend Henry Bate Dudley, claimed sales of 5,000 copies per day; the same figure was suggested by Johan Wilhelm von Archenholz the following year for the *Daily Advertiser* with a further 3-4,500 for the *Public Advertiser*.¹²⁰ These estimates are probably unreliable and exaggerated. In 1784 the circulation of the *Morning Post* was 2,100 daily, but by the time Mr Williamson was its 'conductor', it was down to 1,650.¹²¹ Lutnick gave an average daily sale of 17 London papers in 1780 of 45,422 or 2,672 on average for each paper, and in 1794 the daily sale of a

¹¹⁴ R Ward, *Print Culture, Crime and Justice in Eighteenth-Century London* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp 7-8.

¹¹⁵ M Harris, *London Newspapers in the Age of Walpole. A Study of the Origins of the Modern English Press* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1987), p19.

¹¹⁶ IR Christie, 'British Newspapers in the Later Georgian Age', in IR Christie, *Myth and Reality in Late Eighteenth Century British Politics* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1970), pp 311-333 (p 313). Newspapers were given a 'stamp' to prove that tax had been paid.

¹¹⁷ J Black, 'The Eighteenth-Century British Press' in D Griffiths (ed), *The Encyclopedia of the British Press* (London: Macmillan, 1992), pp 13-23 (p 13).

¹¹⁸ A Andrews, *The History of British Journalism From the Foundation of the Newspaper Press in England, to the Repeal of the Stamp Act in 1855, with Sketches of Press Calamities*, vol 2 (London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1998 reprint), p 76.

¹¹⁹ H Barker, *Newspapers, Politics and Public Opinion in Late Eighteenth Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p 23.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p23.

¹²¹ W Hindle, *The Morning Post 1727-1937. Portrait of a Newspaper* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1937), p 44. In 1795 circulation fell to a mere three hundred and fifty, but the paper nevertheless survived, *ibid.*, p 45.

London journal was estimated at 1,500.¹²² each. According to the *London Advertiser and Guide* in 1790 the best-selling papers in the West End were the *Herald*, *Morning Post* and *World* and in the City the *Daily Advertiser*, *Gazetteer and Ledger*.¹²³ *The Times* was by far the most successful paper by the early- nineteenth century. Aided by the introduction of the Koenig Steam Press in November 1814, which produced 1,000 sheets per hour, by 1815 the paper was selling 5,000 copies every day.¹²⁴ Sales might have been even higher but prohibitive taxation stunted the development of the trade. The cost of a paper stood at 4d at the end of the 1780s, rose in the 1790s to 6d, and reached its highest point at 7d during the Napoleonic Wars.¹²⁵ In the mid-1780s the normal wage rate for unskilled workers in London was 24d per day, a figure that had not risen by the end of the decade.¹²⁶ By 1815, the cost of a newspaper was around two per cent of the weekly wage of a London artisan.¹²⁷

Newspaper prices were thus beyond the reach of many workers and circulations of individual titles seems modest. Furthermore, some people may have read more than one newspaper thereby reducing total readership even further. Jeremy Black has argued therefore that 'the press was marginal to the bulk of the population'. It never established a mass market because bookseller entrepreneurs used the industry primarily as a means to maintain a regular income and find an advertising outlet for their books.¹²⁸ The *Morning Post*, for example, was founded by John Bell with five other news journals, which he regarded as the 'advertising department' for his bookselling business. (James Christie I was another founder of the *Morning Post*, and he similarly used it to advertise his auctions).¹²⁹ The press needed advertising, not only as a supplementary source of income, but also to appeal to the socially aspirant and the better off middling and elite classes. For this reason, eighteenth- and early nineteenth- century newspapers met the needs for a readership based on the high levels of society.¹³⁰ In a study of newspaper advertisements in the early 1790s,

¹²² J Black, *The English Press in the Eighteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), p 105.

¹²³ Hindle, *Morning Post*, p44.

¹²⁴ E King, 'British Newspapers, 1800-1860'. 19th Century British Library Newspapers (Detroit: Gale Cengage Learning, 2007).

¹²⁵ H Barker, *Newspapers, Politics and English Society, 1695-1855* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2000), p 39.

¹²⁶ Black, *English Press*, p 107.

¹²⁷ Barker, *Newspapers, Politics and English Society*, p39.

¹²⁸ J Black, 'The Press and Politics in the Eighteenth-Century', *Media History* 8 (2), (2002), 175-182 (176).

¹²⁹ Hindle, *Morning Post*, pp 8-9.

¹³⁰ M Harris, 'Introduction', in M Harris and A Lee, *The Press in English Society from the Seventeenth to nineteenth Centuries* (London and Toronto: Associated Universities Presses, 1986), pp 19-24 (pp 19-20).

Schweizer and Klein concluded that newspapers were 'a vehicle for the expression of the sentiments of the new moneyed class who comprised a vital segment of the reading public'.¹³¹ Thus newspapers were largely purchased by an upper and middle class clientele. Lower class groups were catered for by ballads and broadsides, and they could hire papers or hear them read aloud. But as Harris has argued, newspapers 'reflect [...] the social and cultural preoccupations of "respectable" readers'.¹³² Technical difficulties limiting production, heavy taxation, Post Office restrictions, poor transport networks and illiteracy also made it difficult to produce sufficient newspapers to establish a mass market. Hence when Pitt became Prime Minister in 1783 there was on average only one newspaper sold for every three hundred inhabitants of Great Britain.¹³³ However many of the obstacles facing newspapers such as poor transportation, difficulties in distribution and illiteracy were not so applicable in London where a mass market was potentially easier. Literacy levels were higher in the capital than in the countryside, newspapers were more convenient to distribute because of a high density population existed in London and the metropolis itself provided a ready source of relatively accessible news. The capital provided a market of 'unique scale and coherence'.¹³⁴

Furthermore newspapers were shared to a greater extent than the present but estimates for this practice vary between five and forty readers for each copy; Addison and Paterson suggested there were twenty readers.¹³⁵ In 1829 the *Westminster Review* thought that each London paper was read by thirty people.¹³⁶ Friends often clubbed together to purchase a single copy to share.¹³⁷ This opened up press readership to a wider social class readership. They could be hired (albeit illegally) from vendors in the street, and in the later eighteenth century artisans could read journals in the less fashionable coffee-houses and taverns.¹³⁸ Thus the Editor of the *Sheffield Register* could legitimately boast that 'All ranks of people from the Peer of the realm to the industrious mechanic find something to please

¹³¹ Cited by H Barker 'England, 1760-1815', in H Barker and S Burrows (eds), *Press, Politics and the Public Sphere in Europe in North America, 1760-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp 93-112 (p 108).

¹³² Harris, 'Introduction', p 20.

¹³³ A Aspinall, 'The Circulation of Newspapers in the Early Nineteenth Century', *The Review of English Studies* xxii (1946), 29-43.

¹³⁴ Harris, *London Newspapers*, p19.

¹³⁵ Black, *English Press*, p105.

¹³⁶ A Aspinall, 'The Circulation of Newspapers in the Early Nineteenth Century', *The Review of English Studies* xxii (1946), 29-43 (30).

¹³⁷ Christie, 'British Newspapers', p 325.

¹³⁸ B Harris, 'Print Culture', in HT Dickinson (ed). *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp 283-293 (p.292).

them in a newspaper'.¹³⁹ For example, the *Daily Advertiser* was read by tradesmen and shopkeepers.¹⁴⁰ Aspinall has concluded that at 'no time were newspapers beyond the reach of town workers.'¹⁴¹ Eighteenth century coffee houses and public houses were major locations for reading the press. Archenholz was of the opinion that the principal reason why Londoners frequented coffee shops was to read the newspapers.¹⁴² In 1780, a commentator in *Lloyds Evening Post* stated that 'without newspapers our Coffee-houses, Ale-houses, and Barber shops would undergo a change next to depopulation'.¹⁴³ The Crown Coffee House took 43 daily newspapers and had five or six copies of the most popular ones, including eight copies of the *Morning Chronicle*, plus provincial and foreign news journals, periodicals and magazines. Remarkably this coffee house was patronised by up to 1,800 customers daily, who were attracted there by cheap coffee and the range of journals. Although all social classes went there, the clientele were mostly artisans.¹⁴⁴ In the 1720s coffee-house proprietors felt compelled to offer a large range of titles for their readers which was eating up to 50% of their annual profits.¹⁴⁵ Archenholz informs us that the most popular coffee houses would buy ten or twelve copies of the same paper so as not to make people wait.¹⁴⁶ Coffee-shops were responsible for helping to widen the class readership of the London press following the reduction of tax on coffee in 1808. Francis Place wrote

These shops were but just then [1815] becoming general. They greatly pleased me, as I could *now* get suitable and timely refreshment in the morning and that too in a warm and otherwise comfortable room with the very pleasant accompaniment of a daily newspaper.

From 1816 he attended a different establishment:

Here I found the additional accommodation of magazines and review for reading the current numbers of which the proprietor made an extra charge of sixpence per month. This charge I was glad to pay for the sake of reading the *Edinburgh* and *Monthly Reviews*, together with the *Edinburgh*, the *European* and the *Monthly Magazines*. These however I read in the evening, while I took my coffee-supper, for I learned to drink coffee at that meal as well as at breakfast-time.¹⁴⁷

¹³⁹ *Sheffield Register* 9 June 1797, cited by Harris, *ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ R Crone, 'What Readers Want: Criminal Intelligence and the Fortunes of the Metropolitan Press during the Long Eighteenth Century', in K Halsey and WR Owens (eds), *The History of Reading. Evidence from the British Isles, c 1750-1950*, vol 2 (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp 103- 20 (p 116)

¹⁴¹ Aspinall, 'Circulation', 29.

¹⁴² Christie, 'British Newspapers', pp 324-5.

¹⁴³ Baker, 'England, 1760-1815', p 107.

¹⁴⁴ Aspinall, 'Circulation', 37.

¹⁴⁵ Harris, *London Newspapers*, p31.

¹⁴⁶ Christie, 'British Newspapers', pp 324-5.

¹⁴⁷ Cited by George, *London Life*, pp 296-7.

Place shared his news with his fellow workmen, thus broadening consumption of the paper beyond those who actually read it, extending it perhaps even to the functionally illiterate.¹⁴⁸ This seems to have been a normal practice. But for those who did not drink coffee, even small public houses in London usually bought two daily papers for their customers, and gin-shops would take one journal.¹⁴⁹ The consumption of newsprint in such public spaces may indicate that people were better informed than they are today because they read so many different papers.¹⁵⁰ Newspapers also enjoyed a wide readership amongst the commercial classes as they needed regular and accurate information about markets, shipping and international affairs. The elite read the papers for court news, parliamentary updates and general news, and all social classes could enjoy reviews of popular theatre and sports and pastimes. As Bob Harris has written

More and more people also began to see themselves and the society of which they were a part through the medium of print; no society had hitherto chronicled its activities and changing habits with the eagerness with which Britons of the eighteenth century did.¹⁵¹

However a burgeoning press required people to edit and write the papers.

From the early eighteenth- century, the existence of large amounts of waste paper is one indicator that newspapers had become part of daily life.¹⁵² For the first time, 'news' became a topic to be bought and sold, an object for commercial consumption - yet, frustratingly - the professional writers who wrote for these publications remain elusive and anonymous.¹⁵³ The term 'journalist' was already in use in Queen Anne's reign, but the occupation was at this point far from professional and enjoyed a low reputation. Dr Johnson observed that '[t]he compilation of newspapers is often committed to narrow and mercenary minds, not qualified for the task of delighting or instructing, who are content to fill their papers with whatever matter is at hand...' He further quipped that a 'news-writer is a man without virtue who writes lies at home for his own profit. To these compositions is required neither genius nor knowledge, neither industry nor sprightliness, but contempt of shame, indifference to truth are absolute.'¹⁵⁴ In 1793 William Winham disparagingly

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p 297.

¹⁴⁹ Aspinall, 'Circulation', 38.

¹⁵⁰ Christie, 'British newspapers'. p 326.

¹⁵¹ B Harris, 'Print Culture', p 283.

¹⁵² KT Winkler, 'The Forces of the Market and the London Newspaper in the First Half of the Eighteenth Century', *Journal of Newspaper and Periodical History* 4 (2), (1988), 22-35 (25).

¹⁵³ Harris, *London Newspapers*, p99.

¹⁵⁴ Cited by D Griffiths, Griffiths, *Fleet Street: Five Hundred Years of the Press* (London: The British Library, 2006), p 40.

referred to journalists as a group of 'bankrupts, lottery-office keepers, footmen and decayed tradesmen'.¹⁵⁵ Things had not much improved by the early nineteenth century. Sir Walter Scott wrote that 'nothing but a thorough-going blackguard ought to attempt the daily Press unless it is some quiet, country dirurnal'.¹⁵⁶ In a similar vein, Sir William Knighton, Keeper of the Privy Purse to George IV, wrote that there was no more despicable men than the 'scoundrels' of the daily press. Newspapers, he argued, were written by 'wretches whose every principle is obnoxious to virtue'.¹⁵⁷ The true nature of crime reporters of this time was amateurish and venial and is perhaps best reflected in the words of Pierce Egan in 1821:

Yonder, Sir, is Mr Goosequill, a 'Seven Dials Bard', who came to town with half-a-crown in his pocket [...] He often makes a good meal upon a monster. A rape has frequently afforded him great satisfaction, but a murder – an out-and-out murder – if well-timed, is board, lodging and washing, with a feast of nectared sweets for many a day.¹⁵⁸

The adverse comments on journalists reflected the fact that the nation was still governed by aristocrats (and their associates) and news writers were representatives of the people reflecting their views to the government.¹⁵⁹ Nevertheless newspaper staff were not well paid even though only a few people were employed to produce the papers. In 1785 the *Morning Post* employed a few compositors at £1.11.6d. per week, but many of the occasional contributors were not always paid.¹⁶⁰ In fact, many newspapers relied upon their readers sending news items in for which there was no financial payment. As compensation for low salaries professional news writers were at least guaranteed regular employment. In the late 1730s writers for the weeklies had probably earned about one guinea per week, and the income of writers who were also the proprietors of their journals varied considerably, but was probably never more than five pounds per week and was usually a lot less.¹⁶¹ In 1777 James Perry was remunerated one guinea per week as an article writer for the *General Advertiser* and was paid an extra half guinea for his help with the *London Evening Post*. In the early 1780s James Stephen was paid two guineas per week as a

¹⁵⁵ Hindle, *Morning Post*, p 48.

¹⁵⁶ A Aspinall, 'The Social Status of Journalists at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century', *The Review of English Studies* xxi (1945), 216-232 (216).

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 218.

¹⁵⁸ Pierce Egan, *Real Life in London* (1821), cited by Steve Chibnall, 'Chronicles of the Gallows: The Social History of Crime Reporting', in H Christian (ed), *The Sociology of Journalism and the Press* (Sociological Review Monograph 29), (Keele: University of Keele, October 1980), 179-217 (179).

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 220. William Woodfall, declared, 'As the printer of the *Morning Chronicle* I am the servant of the public, their message-carrier, their mouthpiece'; Griffiths, *Fleet Street*, p 52.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁶¹ Harris, *London Newspapers*, p 107.

parliamentary reporter, which sometimes necessitated working twenty four hour shifts.¹⁶² However Henry Sampson Wordfall - editor and proprietor of *The Public Advertiser* for thirty years until 1793, was accustomed to boast that he never paid his writers.¹⁶³ But by the end of the eighteenth century, pay was increasing: in 1800 a regular writer and reporter on a quality paper might earn four guineas per week.¹⁶⁴

We know very little about the men (and possibly some women) who wrote for the news journals. It would appear that newspapers employed very few writers directly themselves other than to report on parliamentary proceedings, and the concept of a professional journalist was still distant. Nevertheless, when the *Morning Post* sought to appoint an author, it required 'the Assistance of a Gentleman who is able to write the best English style [...] No hackney-writer need pally (*sic*)'.¹⁶⁵ Usually self-employed wordsmiths would make shorthand notes of the trials held at the quarter sessions or the Old Bailey, and then try to sell their accounts to as many papers as they could. Editors no doubt came to depend upon a number of correspondents who had proven their reliability, and their experience perhaps led to a growing professionalism amongst them. It is more difficult to establish who wrote up reports about the examination of suspects by justices in their parlours or the police offices, or the numerous uncorroborated descriptions of unsolved robberies and other crimes. All articles in the press were anonymous (or used obviously fictional names), including correspondence supposedly from readers. It would seem that newsmen would congregate around magistrates' homes or offices, hoping to pick up stories from the victims themselves or perhaps from witnesses, and accounts from examinations of suspects by justices of the peace were probably 'fed' to the writers by the magistrates either for a fee, or perhaps to further their own careers or political agenda (such as Henry Fielding or Patrick Colquhoun might have done), or else to obtain further evidence about the case. Following the destruction of the Bow Street Public Office by the Gordon Rioters in the summer of 1780, the *Morning Chronicle* approved the replacement office as being 'more commodious' since it provided better seating not only for the magistrates and clerks, but also for the 'writers to the papers'.¹⁶⁶

In addition to semi-professional news-gatherers and wordsmiths, newspaper editors relied upon interested members of the public submitting details of robberies where they had been either the victim or an observer. Many editors directly encouraged this because not

¹⁶² Christie, 'British Newspapers'. p 321.

¹⁶³ Griffiths, *Fleet Street*, p 46.

¹⁶⁴ Christie, 'British Newspapers', pp 321-2.

¹⁶⁵ *Morning Post* 17 November 1785.

¹⁶⁶ *Morning Chronicle* 3 August 1780.

only was it an extremely cheap and easy way to fill a paper, but first-hand evidence also had an extra vein of excitement running through the account as well as additional authenticity. Thus the *London Chronicle* carried an account that proudly announced its source:

Mr Sherman who came to town on Tuesday from Biggleswade in Hertfordshire (*sic*) gives the fol[l]owing account of his being robbed ...

The report continued with a certain vividness of personal experience:

That about a mile before he came to Hatfield, he was overtaken by a man of genteel appearance, when they entered into conversation. At length the stranger asked if he intended to stop anywhere to dine; Mr Sherman said he shall stop at the Room in Hatfield. The stranger then said if it was agreeable he would dine along with him, which Mr Sherman agreed to. After dinner they set out for London [...] When they got about a mile on this side [of] Whetstone, the stranger stopped and said, Sir, I must now take my leave of you but before [we] part, pulling out a pistol, I must have your money, and robbed him of seven guineas, two half guineas, near 20s in silver, and taking a bye road, rode off full speed.¹⁶⁷

It is interesting to note how the account veers into a narrative which reflects the ways in which a person might recollect a recent vivid experience. Other reports were anonymous but the newspaper nevertheless emphasised the personal voice in the account:

A gentleman who came to town on Saturday from Reading says that he was stop't in Maidenhead thicket by two highwaymen, who ordered him out of the post chaise and robbed him of his purse containing ten guineas and a half and some silver and his gold watch.¹⁶⁸

Other anonymous reports described the experience of witnesses or of victims they had met on the road, and the press were usually anxious to stress the authenticity and reliability of these accounts. In one such case

An inhabitant of Hackney assures us that as he was walking to Hackney on Wednesday evening [...] a gentleman's servant, with whom he had met on the road informed him he had just been robbed by a single footpad within the distance of twenty yards of one of the watchmen ...

When he informed the watchman of the robbery, 'the man was just running before him' but because the theft was only eighteen pence, 'the watchman replied it was not worthwhile to mind eighteen-pence' and refused to pursue the offender.¹⁶⁹ Some accounts

¹⁶⁷ *London Chronicle* 25 August 1785

¹⁶⁸ *Times/Daily Universal Register* 22 November 1785; *Whitehall Evening Post* 22 November 1785.

¹⁶⁹ *Morning Chronicle* 18 November 1780.

suggest that their source was the person who alerted the authorities. Near Newbury, '[a] good looking man, about 40 years of age was lately found by a poor man in a ditch [...] with his throat cut, supposed to be done by some footpads, as his pockets were turned inside out'.¹⁷⁰ However such eye witness reports are relatively quite rare. It is also of interest that these accounts were not as subject to plagiarism as the other types of robbery reports and many appeared in only one publication. This probably means that these reports were regarded to some extent as 'scoops'. Since so many of this type of account were not plagiarised, first hand presentations were probably genuine witness reports rather than being a journalistic device to promote the story. However we know very little about the identity or veracity of those who reported robberies in the press, and lacking self-report studies, we have few ways in which to assess the adequacy and integrity of the original sources. News writers, it was said, often hung about the public offices trying to speak to a clerk or doorkeeper for information, for which they paid a shilling or a pint of wine.¹⁷¹ Others visited prisons, taverns, coffee houses for news for which they were paid one penny per line if their story was published.¹⁷² Being paid by quantity rather than quality, the temptation to embellish a story was considerable.

Despite changes in press reports, format of news and some technological change, in many other ways early nineteenth- century newspapers differed little in form and style to those produced in the late eighteenth- century. Essentially they were four page constructions with advertisements dominating the first page; most of the crime stories were still located on the third page. They were produced in small workshops and financially unable to draw upon a *corps* of professional writers. Their essential problem was technological: access to news was limited before the introduction of reliable telegraphy and distribution outside the capital was restricted before rail transportation became widespread in the 1840s.¹⁷³ The production process had barely changed in a century. Compositors stood at frames (stands for holding cases of type), setting each character by hand in composing sticks, placing justified lines of type on galleys before being locked in chases for printing on wooden hand presses. The 'Stanhope' iron press had been introduced at the end of the century, but this was still a manual process producing no more than two hundred and fifty copies per hour.¹⁷⁴ Only the *Times* innovated by adopting the more technologically

¹⁷⁰ *Whitehall Evening Post* 18 November 1785.

¹⁷¹ M Harris, *London newspapers in the age of Walpole* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University press; London: Associated University Presses, 1987), p 158.

¹⁷² R Haig, *The Gazetteer, 1735-1797* (Carbondale, IL., Southern Illinois University Press, 1960), p 70.

¹⁷³ King, 'British Newspapers'.

¹⁷⁴ Griffiths, *Fleet Street*, p 61.

advanced Koenig press. Newspapers still failed to provide illustrations or maps. They remained four pages long due to taxation, but the pages became larger and the print smaller and the number of columns increased from one or two to around five.¹⁷⁵ However there is some evidence that in the early nineteenth-century the press was starting to become more professional in its approach to news reporting. Fuelled by the growth of advertising revenue, newspapers were able to take on more reporting staff and reportage increasingly departed from the news-gathering, chronicle register of daily events to more detailed accounts of news.

Newspaper reportage was nevertheless anonymous and impersonal, and most news items were brief, lacking explanation or introduction.¹⁷⁶ Their main news was political. The principal source for a newspaper editor was other papers: all newspapers heavily plagiarised from one another (although this is less evident in the early nineteenth-century press). They were essentially 'scissor and paste' jobs, put together on a daily or regular basis according to the same template.¹⁷⁷ The late Hanoverian newspaper was essentially a bourgeois construction, full of advertisements for consumer goods that only the middle classes and elite readers could afford to purchase with regularity. The papers reflected a moral politeness and improvement favoured by the middle classes; paternalism, rather than worker activism, was presented as 'a necessary moral good'.¹⁷⁸ Despite this, newspapers contained the expression of many different views: this was due to a dependence upon public submissions since the press employed few professional reporters, and the necessity to maximise sales and advertising in order to stay in business.¹⁷⁹

Crime stories were a major part of a newspaper since crime accounts were thought to attract readers. Furthermore, they were a reliable – and cheap – source for editors: always an important consideration for newspapers of the long eighteenth century.¹⁸⁰ Descriptions of criminal activities not only stimulated and titillated readers, they also provided advice about danger spots to potential victims. They also warned potential criminals about the serious consequences of law breaking.¹⁸¹ Newspapers sometimes saw themselves as

¹⁷⁵ J Black, 'The eighteenth century British press', in D Griffiths (ed), *The Encyclopedia of the British Press* (London: Macmillan, 1992), pp 13-23.

¹⁷⁶ J Black, *The English Press in the Eighteenth Century* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), p.26.

¹⁷⁷ L Brown, *Victorian News and Newspapers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p 3.

¹⁷⁸ Black, 'Press and Politics', pp 177-8.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p 180.

¹⁸⁰ R Shoemaker, 'Print Culture and the Creation of Public Knowledge about Crime in Eighteenth-Century London', in P Knepper, J Doak, J Shephard (eds), *Urban Crime Prevention, Surveillance and Restorative Justice* (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2009), pp 1-21 (p4).

¹⁸¹ Black, *English Press, 1621-1861*, p 54.

helping along the process of justice. Thus when reporting a robbery in Andover in 1778, the *Reading Mercury* stated that, '[a]s the above villains may possibly be lurking in this neighbourhood, these descriptions, if attended to, may be the means of bringing them to Justice'.¹⁸² The London press also contained descriptions of crimes, stolen goods and perpetrators in the hope that witnesses would come forward to identify items, persons or provide further information. In addition newspapers contained advertisements, usually placed by prosecution associations, seeking the return of purloined items with the offer of a reward. These advertisements 'represented the collision of new print culture with the peculiar English criminal justice system', namely, the recovery of stolen property and the prosecution of offenders as the responsibility of the victim.¹⁸³ King has argued that, together with the greater availability of commercial printing, the growth of the press, including provincial newspapers, enabled prosecution associations to flourish (although such associations were not common in the metropolis).¹⁸⁴ Victims were now able to broadcast details about stolen property and criminals through advertisements in a newspaper as well as by handbills. These two forms of print media took over from the 'hue and cry' pursuit of suspects.¹⁸⁵ In cases of horse theft in Yorkshire, when cases came to court advertisements in the press and handbills were a proven method of detection.¹⁸⁶ The Essex press claimed credit for the arrest of a housebreaker in 1764 'in consequence of an advert' in the *Chelmsford Chronicle*, and in 1773 the same paper boasted about Sir John Fielding's suggestion that one of its advertisements had helped to catch a murderer. Many early nineteenth century commentators were also of the view that the provincial press assisted the detection and arrest of offenders.¹⁸⁷ King's evidence from Essex suggests that the claim had some basis in fact: in a sample of 67 advertisements placed between 1775 and 1795, 22% per cent can be linked to a later prosecution.¹⁸⁸ Advertisements may also

¹⁸² *Reading Mercury* 26 October 1778 cited by *ibid.*, p54.

¹⁸³ R Crone, 'What Readers Want: Criminal intelligence and the Fortunes of the Metropolitan Press during the Long Eighteenth Century' in K Halsey and WR Owens (eds), *The History of Reading: Evidence from the British Isles, c 1750-1950*, vol.2, (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp 103-120 (p 103).

¹⁸⁴ P King, *Crime, Justice, and Discretion in England 1740-1820* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005 reprint), p 57. On prosecution associations see D Philips, 'Good Men to Associate and Bad Men to Conspire. Associations for the Prosecution of Felons in England, 1760-1860', in D Hay and F Snyder (eds), *Policing and Prosecution in Britain, 1750-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp 113-70, P King, 'Prosecution Associations and their Impact in Eighteenth-Century Essex', in *ibid.*, pp 171-210, and A Shubert, 'Private Initiative in law Enforcement. Associations for the Prosecution of Felons, 1744-1856', in V Bailey (ed), *Policing and Punishment in Nineteenth Century Britain* (London, 1981), pp 25-41.

¹⁸⁵ J Styles, 'Print and Policing. Crime Advertising in Eighteenth-Century Provincial England', in Hay and Snyder (eds), *Policing and Prosecution*, pp56, 82-6.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp 76-87.

¹⁸⁷ King, *Crime, Justice and Discretion*, p 61.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p 61.

have assisted private negotiations with criminals allowing the victim to recover their property without the formality of a prosecution.¹⁸⁹ However, although undoubtedly press advertisements (and to a lesser extent handbills) played some role in London similar to that in Essex and Yorkshire, the extent to which this is the case in the capital is open to question. The cost of placing an advertisement was high – three shillings and six pence in 1782 – and therefore ordinary Londoners would find the expense prohibitive.¹⁹⁰ Shoemaker has convincingly suggested that the growing use of advertisements – and the subsequent rise of professional thief-takers in the metropolis – reflect a growing abdication of responsibility by the private citizen for public policing and law enforcement in favour of official agencies.¹⁹¹ Nevertheless rates of private prosecutions did remain high well into the nineteenth century, and Londoners may have used the advertisement pages in ways that did not necessarily end in a court prosecution – for example, to check whether items offered for sale were stolen or not.¹⁹²

However, advertisements about stolen or ‘lost’ property (a euphemism allowing victims to offer a reward without the necessity of a prosecution), were not the only sources of information about criminal activity in the contemporary press. Newspapers also contained descriptions of magistrates’ examinations of suspects, accounts of arrests, trials and executions as well as stories by victims of unsolved crimes. Such accounts are a valuable source of information about crimes as experienced directly by victims themselves, unmediated by the formalities of the trial process or interrogations by the justice of the peace. They directly articulate the victim’s ‘voice’, albeit edited to an unknown degree by the journal. Compared to other forms of print, such as the ballad or the biographical pamphlet, which focused upon the experience of the offender, the newspaper contained a new discourse of victimisation.¹⁹³ This totally new representation of aggravated theft in the newspaper made readers familiar with the methodology of its perpetrators in ways that pamphlets did not.¹⁹⁴ As a consequence of reading press accounts of violent robberies, consumers of newspapers would have concluded that robberies were endemic, invariably violent and possibly lethal. They were random acts indiscriminately committed by strangers. There were no descriptions of ‘polite’ or considerate highwaymen in the samples

¹⁸⁹ Styles, ‘Print and Policing’, pp 76-81; King, *Crime, Justice and Discretion*, pp 59-62.

¹⁹⁰ Crone, ‘What Readers Want’, p 112.

¹⁹¹ R Shoemaker, *The London Mob. Violence and Disorder in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Hambledon and London, 2004), pp 36-7, 48-9.

¹⁹² Crone, ‘What Readers Want’, p 118, p114.

¹⁹³ E Snell, ‘Discourses of Criminality in the Eighteenth-Century Press: the Presentation of Crime in *The Kentish Post*, 1717-1768’, *Continuity and Change* 22 (i), (2007), 13-47 (29).

¹⁹⁴ E Snell, ‘Representations of Criminality and Victimisation in Provincial Newspapers: *The Kentish Post*, 1717-1768[’, *Southern History*, 27, (2005), 48-75 (61).

of newspapers used for this study, whereas this was relatively common in the older pamphlets. For example, robbers were shown to be impervious to age, gender or requests for gentle or lenient treatment by the victim. Resistance was shown to be futile at best or possibly fatal in its consequences. Undoubtedly, the impression given to the reader was that being robbed was a very frightening experience indeed. Furthermore, newspaper reports of robberies lacked the context that pamphlets had provided. Pamphlets were didactic and moralistic in tone and content, and by focusing on the offender's life, the reader can understand some of the motivations behind the criminal incident.¹⁹⁵ Victim reports made crimes seem random and motiveless, and the criminal impulse mysterious and threatening. They are also significant sources of evidence about crimes that may have remained unsolved and unprosecuted, and would not, therefore have come to the attention of the historian.

Editorial roles

William Chadwick summarised the limitations of newspapers thus:

It may be supposed that the daily newspapers are adequate to give all the desired information. In answer, it may be stated that the newspapers do not possess the means of collecting it, neither have they the space to publish it in addition to their ordinary matter, nor have they the inclination, supposing them able. Their columns are dedicated to that matter only which is conceived to be of general interest. Of the cases even now examined before magistrates, not one in ten possesses this attraction; not one in ten consequently is ever noticed by the public journals.¹⁹⁶

Chadwick's comments highlight the difficulties facing editors. First, they had to be aware of an incident before it could be considered for publication and low levels of reporting staff could make this problematic. Second there was insufficient space in the paper to prevent all the available crime news, and furthermore crime stories were in competition with other types of news. Editors therefore had to select which stories should be published out of the pool of reportable crimes.¹⁹⁷ Editorial prioritisation was likely to be influenced heavily by journalistic perceptions about what the public wished to read about in order for their papers to sell in large numbers. But the pool of available accounts of committed crimes was in itself affected by public perception, that is, by the decisions of the public to report

¹⁹⁵ A McKenzie, *Tyburn's Martyrs. Execution in England, 1675-1775* (London and New York: Hambledon Continuum, 2007), pp 59-67; E Snell, 'Perceptions of Violent Crime in Eighteenth-Century England: A Study of Discourses of Homicide, Aggravated Larceny and Sexual Assault in the Eighteenth-Century Newspaper', (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Kent at Canterbury, 2004), pp 19-20.

¹⁹⁶ *The London Review*, 1 (1829), 252-308 (281)

¹⁹⁷ B Roshier, 'The Selection of Crime News by the Press', in S Cohen and J Young, (eds), *The Manufacture of News, Social Problems, Deviance, and the Mass Media*, revised edn., (London Constable, Beverley Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1981), pp 40-51 (p40).

offences to the authorities or give their stories to the press. The public response was, in turn, influenced by what they had read in newspapers.¹⁹⁸ Crime news, as Peter King reminds us,

Is not just collected or discovered – it is manufactured. By selecting certain items from the vast number of potentially newsworthy materials available, those responsible for the editing process assemble a final product which, though it is dependent for its existence on the availability of suitable raw materials, does not inevitably – or even usually – reflect with any accuracy the range or nature of those materials. Making crime news, even at this initial stage before any interpretative writing or editorialising has been done, is a highly creative process.¹⁹⁹

Whereas modern criminologists may have access to a newsroom and can analyse crime stories as they come to the attention of newspaper, television or radio news editors, the historian can only work from the finished product. In the case of robberies and burglaries, we will never know how many, or what kind of accounts were available to an editor that were not printed in his newspaper.²⁰⁰

Editors played an important role in the presentation of crime news. The editor of *The Kentish Post* between 1717 and 1768 appears to have applied a ‘template’ whereby crime reportage consistently represented around thirty per cent of the paper’s content, except in war time.²⁰¹ Sources such as diaries and justices’ notebooks confirm that minor thefts and assaults were more prevalent than robbery, yet it is evident that newspapers distorted this by disproportionately reporting serious offences like robbery. In a sample of London papers between 1723 and 1763 ¼ of the crimes reported involved violence, yet crimes involving violence and murder were only 7% of the offences tried at the Old Bailey. Shoemaker concluded that ‘as a proportion of all serious crimes tried, newspapers were about four times more likely to report violent crimes than any other type of offense’.²⁰² Since readers may have perceived that minor thefts were not newsworthy, this may have discouraged victims from informing the press about minor criminal incidents, thereby distorting the

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p 40.

¹⁹⁹ P King, ‘Making Crime News: Newspapers, Violent Crime and the Selective Reporting of Old Bailey Trials in the Late Eighteenth Century’, *Crime, Histoire et Societies/Crime, History and Societies*, 13 (i), (2009), 91-116 (93-4).

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 94.

²⁰¹ E Snell, ‘Discourses of criminality in the eighteenth-century press: the presentation of crime in *The Kentish Post*, 1717-1768’, *Continuity and Change*, 22 (i), (2007), 13-47 (20-21).

²⁰² R Shoemaker, ‘Print Culture and the Creation of Public Knowledge about Crime in 18th –century London’, in P Knepper, J Doak and J Shephard, (eds), *Urban Crime Prevention, Surveillance and Restorative Justice. Effects of Social Technologies* (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2009), pp 1-21 (p 5).

news even further.²⁰³

Old Bailey trials were an important source of news, especially for the dailies, and the same editorial selectivity is evident in trial press reports. Editors clearly prioritised crimes involving violence or that carried a capital sentence. Out of a sample of three papers in 1790, only 9.6% of trials involving direct theft without the use of violence were reported in at least one journal, but 22% of highway robbery (i.e theft with violence) trials were. The figure for burglary/housebreaking is 16%.²⁰⁴ Further analysis shows that the depth of reporting in an account of a crime also varied according to the use of violence within that felonious incident. The lowest level of coverage was given to thefts not involving violence, such as burglary or animal stealing. Above all, a story had to be perceived as newsworthy – of interest to readers. Thus in 1790 *The Times*, after describing a robbery trial at the Old Bailey, informed its readers that ‘several other prisoners were convicted of larcenies but none of a nature sufficiently interesting to merit insertion’.²⁰⁵ Other factors affecting newsworthiness include humour in a story, famous people as victims or ‘celebrity’ criminals, and highly unusual or daring crimes. Undoubtedly editors were tempted to ‘spice up’ their prints to titillate or shock their readers, especially on a slow news day. The editor of the *Chelmsford Chronicle* complained that ‘our public papers during the recesses of parliament, especially since the return of peace [...] have become exceedingly dull and unentertaining’.²⁰⁶ Such papers did not maintain sufficient readers and advertising to remain long in business. However these editorial necessities appear to have applied primarily to the London market where competition between newspaper titles was fiercest. Papers in York, Chester and Newcastle-upon-Tyne adopted a very different tone and style in reporting serious, violent crime. Reportage tended to be matter-of-fact, short and unsensational. Whilst readers may still have perceived crime to be a serious problem, rather than generating serious anxiety and fear, press reports gave the impression that ‘crime was an unwelcome occurrence which came to individuals as did so many other unwelcome events’.²⁰⁷ Newspaper representation of serious crime was given greater impact by the frequent repetition of a story and grouping together reports of a similar nature in a relatively small part of the page. Walpole, when commenting on the riots of 1771, noted that they ‘possibly [...] ma[de] less impression on the spot than by a collection

²⁰³ King, ‘Making Crime News’, 95.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 97-8

²⁰⁵ *Times* 1 March 1790.

²⁰⁶ P King, *Crime, Justice and Discretion in England, 1740-1820* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p 165.

²⁰⁷ J Sharpe, ‘Reporting Crime in the North of England Eighteenth-Century Newspaper: a Preliminary Investigation’, *Crime, Histoire et Societies/Crime, History and Societies*, 16 (i), 92012), 25-45.

of them crowded into a newspaper'.²⁰⁸ Such exaggerated reporting of violent was deliberate.²⁰⁹ It was, according to King, a vicious circle whereby papers over-emphasised violence because of readers' expectations. The significance of this, King has argued is that

Reports of 'gangs infesting' a particular neighbourhood may have been grounded more in the local community's fears and stereotypes or in newspapers' needs to increase their circulation than in observed reality.²¹⁰

However it is also evident that many crime news stories contained inaccuracies. Some contemporaries were well aware that newspaper reportage was not always truthful or error free. Lady Sarah Lennox, who herself was sensitive about the press having had a bruising encounter with the notorious Reverend Henry Bate Dudley as editor of the *Morning Post*, complained bitterly that the paper 'is full of lies and no news'.²¹¹ In 1763 an aristocrat accused the press of being little more than a 'chaos of truth and falsehood'.²¹² In truth both the layout and style of newspapers and the preferences of the late eighteenth century reading public meant that 'news' resembled humour and idle gossip and numerous inaccuracies appeared in print.²¹³ Newspapers were, in fact, aware of some of these accusations and, like modern British tabloid newspapers, laid the blame squarely on their readers and potential customers. Thus *The Gazetteer* noted that Dudley, as editor of the *Morning Post*, realised that a newspaper as 'a record of private and public scandal would suit the taste of the Public and fill their pockets'. The paper concluded that '[t]he public have been to blame by encouraging such Papers. Many like the tale of a scandal'.²¹⁴

Newspapers may have deliberately sought to distort on occasion by selective omission or the insertion of partial truths or a fanciful invention. However an impressionistic view of newspapers would suggest that deliberate misrepresentation was most likely to occur in the political content or in scandals concerning wealthy or important persons. On occasion, newspapers were at pains to point out to their readers that some stories of robberies were fictitious. For example, a pre-Christmas edition of the *Whitehall Evening Post* noted that, contrary to reports in many papers, the Worcester mail coach had *not* in fact been robbed.²¹⁵ Similarly the *Public Advertiser* recorded that '[s]everal paragraphs having lately appeared in the public prints' about footpad robberies in Knightsbridge and Brompton, had

²⁰⁸ Shoemaker, 'Print Culture'. p 5.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., p 7.

²¹⁰ King, *Crime, Justice and Discretion*, p.215.

²¹¹ DT Andrew and R McGowen, *The Perreaus and Mrs Rudd. Forgery and Betrayal in Eighteenth Century London* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2001), p 58.

²¹² Ibid., p 61.

²¹³ Ibid., p 60.

²¹⁴ Ibid., p 59.

²¹⁵ *Whitehall Evening Post* 23 December 1790.

been inserted, 'as is supposed, to answer some sinister purpose'. The paper, however, had 'authority to declare, from the strictest enquiry made, that there is not the least foundation for any of those reports', including the robbery of Mr Walsh at Hyde Park Corner.²¹⁶

Other inaccuracies would have occurred because of the quality of their sources, the difficulties involved in ascertaining their veracity, and the inevitable 'slippage' between the newspaper writer's initial notes and the final printed account in the news journal. Magnus Huber's quantitative assessment of authentic spoken language printed in the *Proceedings of the Old Bailey* concludes that 'written records of a speech event are susceptible to interference – whether conscious or inadvertent – throughout the production process'. He has identified five consecutive stages from the original speech event to the printed *Proceedings*. These are:

- (1) The speech event
- (2) The note-taking – shorthand or orthographic longhand.
- (3) The preparation of the manuscript for the printer: for example, expanding shorthand notes into orthographic text.
- (4) Proofreading
- (5) Typesetting.²¹⁷

The author notes that it is possible, although highly unlikely, that typesetters worked directly from the shorthand manuscript. A similar process would have taken place by the writer taking notes directly from the spoken accounts of victims describing their experiences of robbery to themselves, or indirectly from the injured parties' reports to justices of the peace or police, or from information provided by witnesses, policing agents or magistrates. At each of these stages lay the possibility of accidental error. Other factors would include the personal idiosyncrasies of writers and editors as well as the imposition of any required house style or other editorial requirements.²¹⁸ Additional consideration would have been given to notions of public acceptability and the perceived taste of their readers.

Writers were also heavily dependent for the accuracy of their reports upon the good memories and intentions of robbery and burglary victims, and the pure motives of justices and the parish constables and the night watch. Mistakes and falsified accounts were

²¹⁶ *Public Advertiser* 11 December 1790.

²¹⁷ M Huber, 'The Old Bailey Proceedings, 1674-1834: Evaluating and annotating a corpus of 18th- and 19th- century spoken English', *Annotating Variation and Change* 1, (2007), www.helsinki.fi/varieng/journal/volumes/01/huber (not paginated).

²¹⁸ Ibid.

compounded by the remarkably large amount of plagiarism between all newspapers: the difficulties in obtaining sufficient news and comment and publishing to a regular and demanding schedule meant that stories of robberies and burglaries were frequently copied verbatim by several newspapers, errors and falsifications included.

However, we know very little about the daily production processes of the London press in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth- centuries. Many writers probably worked on a freelance basis and may have offered already prepared copy to as many journals as they could. Pre-written accounts, whether plagiarised or not, had the additional advantage for editors of providing a replication which made typesetting considerably easier and quicker – which was an important consideration in times when typesetting was manual with moveable type. There were, of course, no precedents for the successful production of newspapers, and the owners of journals received very little feedback about what their customers did or did not like about their product other than through direct sales figures. Since newspapers were a new concept in news dissemination, it was left to their owners and editors to fashion this original medium using both their imaginative flair and business sense. Moreover sales figures were difficult to interpret since individual copies of news journals were also read by many different readers in taverns, coffee houses and barber shops where they did not need to purchase a paper in order to read it. The ‘conductors’ of papers had very few ways of checking the accuracy of the reports presented to them, and little control over the writers who sold them their accounts. The punishing schedules of daily or thrice-weekly production often gave the editor little choice except to accept what was before him in good faith. Furthermore, since a newspaper had to be filled completely with no blank spaces, this was a further incentive for editors to print dubious stories, or to publish details of crimes that would not normally have merited inclusion – a further factor complicating our understanding of editorial selection policies. A complainant to *Berrow’s Worcester Journal* made the point well:

In the Nature of a Newspaper,’ *non datur vacuum*’, - A Newspaper must be as full as an Egg: - It is not likely many other daily Vehicles or Stages, which frequently go off half empty, and sometimes without any Passengers at all, but is obliged to set out at the appointed Time, and *must* be cram’d full, Outside and Inside, Before and Behind, Top and Bottom; nay, if there is but *one* empty Place, you are sure to be overset. Since this is the case with those political Vehicles, Newspapers and there exists an absolute Necessity of Plenitude, ‘tis no Wonder that the conductors of those Machines are not very scrupulous or nice in the Choice of their Company; but rather than suffer any Vacancy, they imitate the great Man’s Servants in the *Parable*, who went out to the Streets and Highways, collecting the Old and the Young, the Lame, the Blind, the Good, and the Bad; in

short, whomsoever they could get to make up the Number of Guests.²¹⁹

Newspaper readers therefore had good cause to be critical or cynical about what they read. A contemporary observer believed that 'News-Collectors [...] invent[ed] stories of rapes, robberies, riots, &c to fill up the news-papers of the ensuing week'.²²⁰ Pre-trial reports in the press could be prejudicial, leading to an announcement about the problem by the Attorney General in 1782.²²¹ And Horace Walpole concluded that press accounts 'seldom fail to reach the outline of incidents'. But 'if a paragraph in a newspaper contains a word of truth, it is sure to be accompanied with two or three blunders [...] [the] papers published in the face of the whole town [are] nothing but lies, every one of which fifty persons could contradict and disprove'.²²² Gossipy Walpole may have deliberately exaggerated for effect, and modern scholarship has concluded that a large amount of newspaper reportage was reasonably accurate, unless the item was especially notorious or political.²²³ Although consumers may have sometimes entertained doubts about some of the crime stories they read about in the press, they had little to compare the accounts with. There were broadsides about the execution of individual criminals, as well as ballads and handbills and pamphlets but even these could claim no greater objectivity and they lacked the up to the minute topicality of the newspaper. By the late eighteenth century, newspapers had become the most significant source of printed news for most literate (and some illiterate) Londoners on crime and justice issues.²²⁴ As Horace Walpole stated, newspapers were the 'oracles of the times, and what everybody reads and cites'.²²⁵ As such they were a significant factor in shaping the public's attitudes to crime and justice and the effectiveness of policing, the magistracy and the courts: more important, King, Snell and Ward argue, than personal direct experience of crime. Crime news reports might have confirmed readers' existing beliefs or radically change their perceptions.²²⁶

²¹⁹ *Berrow's Worcester Journal* 30 November 1769, cited by J Black, *The English Press in the Eighteenth Century* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), p 25.

²²⁰ GJ Durston, *Whores and Highwaymen. Crime and Justice in the Eighteenth-Century Metropolis* (Hook: Waterside Press, 2012), p 27.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, pp 27-28.

²²² WS Lewis (ed), *Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, 48 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937-83), 20, p 111.

²²³ J Oldham, 'Law Reporting in the London Newspapers, 1756-1786', *American Journal of Legal History*, 31 (3), 177-206 (177-8).

²²⁴ King, 'Newspaper Reporting and Attitudes', 74; RM Ward, *Print Culture, Crime and Justice in Eighteenth-Century London* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014).

²²⁵ R Shoemaker, 'Print culture and the creation of public knowledge about crime in eighteenth-century London', in P Knapper, J Doak and J Shapland (eds), *Urban Crime, Prevention, Surveillance and Restorative Justice: Effects of Social Technologies* (Boca Raton, FL.: CRC Press, 2009), pp 1-21 (4).

²²⁶ Snell, 'Discourses', 14.

Edward Gray, a rotation office justice, was robbed by highwaymen in 1785. When they demanded his companion's watch, Gray proffered his own because, he stated at the Old Bailey trial, based upon his own experience, 'I am apt to be robbed, and therefore I brought a watch on purpose'.²²⁷

Reader reception

As an exciting and new way of presenting current affairs, eighteenth-century newspapers enjoyed an influence over its readership that is difficult to envisage today. Readers had no other authoritative news source available to them and therefore no means to assess the truth of what they were reading other than a healthy innate scepticism. The newspaper press was foundational for the inner life of many Georgians. For example, readership of the press transformed the use of the commonplace book: instead of recording events about themselves, Georgians used their books like scrap-books comprising news cuttings from newspapers. As David Allan has explained,

[r]outine exposure to print journalism [...] led to its characteristic contents, perspectives and priorities enjoying unprecedented influence over readers' outlooks. It stimulated their imaginations and met their need for additional information. It also satisfied their appetite for diversion and amusement.²²⁸

By the late eighteenth-century, the newspaper had become part of family culture.²²⁹

Reading, it was thought, was becoming a national obsession. Dr Johnson exclaimed

To us, who are regaled every morning and evening with intelligence, and are supplied from day to day with materials for conversation, it is difficult to conceive how man can subsist without a newspaper, or to what entertainment companies can assemble, in those wide regions of the earth that have neither *Chronicles*, nor *Magazines*, neither *Gazettes*, nor *Advertisers*, neither *Journals* nor *Evening Posts*.²³⁰

Newspapers created a community of readers, united by their love of the 'news'. The press gave them their information in a culture of immediacy and relevancy, able to take events, often seemingly disconnected, and create a *developing* view of the world, creating not only

²²⁷ N Landau, 'Gauging crime in late eighteenth-century London', *Social History*, 35 (4), (2010), 396-417.

²²⁸ D Allan, *Commonplace Books and Reading in Georgian England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp 226-227.

²²⁹ U Heyd, *Reading newspapers: press and public in eighteenth-century Britain and America* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2012), p 21 n 112.

²³⁰ Cited *idem.*, p 1.

a past, but also a present and anticipated future.²³¹ These considerations are clearly important in understanding the context of how newspapers were able to shape perceptions of criminality. Furthermore, a newspaper is essentially fictive and relies upon the reader to link the disparate stories into a coherent, imagined whole.²³² To do this it relies upon the imagination.²³³ For example, the reader had not witnessed a highway robbery directly when they read about it in the paper: it is imagined as a representative robbery because the victim or robber was not known personally to the consumer. The ways in which newspapers are consumed is a significant part of their importance. The journal is an ephemeral product, designed to be read soon after its production as it rapidly becomes obsolete. The reader will become aware that he or she is part of an 'imagined community' of readers, seen or unseen, consuming the paper in (apparently) the same way.²³⁴ This may also lead to a similar absorption of the message conveyed by the journal's crime stories. The majority of crime accounts were relatively simplistic affairs, with an emphasis on violence, and were intended to shock, alarm or otherwise entertain their readers, and were no doubt read that way. Although there was a growing sophistication in reading practices by some towards the end of the eighteenth century, the dominant mode of reading was 'unruly [...], naïve, non-reflexive and undisciplined'.²³⁵ Thus crime stories, in the main, would have been read by many, if not most people, in the ways in which newspaper editors hoped they would be read. As Ward has argued, although some readers may have read the press critically, 'for the most part readers seem to have taken crime literature – particularly newspapers and the *Proceedings* – at face value, regularly coming to the conclusion that crime was a serious and threatening social problem'.²³⁶

Newspapers were one of the major shapers and influencers of opinion and helped shape perceptions of criminality. In the early eighteenth-century the concept of the polite gentleman highway robber emerged, as epitomised by mid-century printed representations of highwayman James Maclaine. However the growth of the newspaper press with its regular accounts of brutal crimes, criminals apprehended and trials of highwaymen helped to dislodge the more comforting image, as perpetrated by ballads and criminal biographies.

²³¹ Ibid, pp 1, 3, 7, 8

²³² BRO'G Anderson, *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, 2nd edn., (London: Verso, 2006), p 33

²³³ Ibid., p 32.

²³⁴ Ibid., p 35.

²³⁵ R Wittmann, 'Was there a Reading Revolution at the End of the Eighteenth Century?', in S Towheed, R Crone and K Halsey (eds), *The History of Reading* (Routledge: Abingdon and New York, 2011), pp 41-2.

²³⁶ R Ward, 'Print Culture, Moral Panic, and the Administration of the Law: The London Crime Wave of 1744', *Crime, Histoire et Societies / Crime, History and Societies* 16 (i), (2012), 5-24.

Furthermore the press distorted the image of highway robberies by first, disproportionately reporting them rather than more run-of-the mill crimes. In addition derogatory language was used by the press, describing robbers as 'ruffians', 'villains' or 'rogues' and turning witness statements before magistrates into exaggerated descriptions of the thefts.²³⁷ The frequency of robberies reported in newspapers and the ways in which they were described helped to destroy the fallacy of the gentlemanly polite highwayman, and there came to be little distinction in the public mind between the much-feared footpad and the highway robber. Readers often responded to accounts of crimes with alarm. They might, for example, exaggerate the violence they read about. In 1793 the press contained stories about the baby of a Frenchman found in the River Thames, but by the time Horace Walpole was informed about it, the story had become one of murder by drowning.²³⁸ Others armed themselves or formed prosecution associations, assisting in advertising news of crimes against its members and offering rewards for the successful apprehension of criminals.²³⁹ Furthermore the press could create, on occasion, 'moral panics': through selective reporting of crime news, newspapers could generate such a fear of crime that there were increased prosecutions even when there may have been no increase in actual crime. The shared message common to the majority of crime reports was that crime was commonplace, and it demanded – and sometimes obtained – positive action from law enforcers and the courts.

Conclusion

In the 1780s, contemporary opinion about London crime was universally pessimistic, but by the early nineteenth century views varied between the sanguine and the despondent. There is some evidence to support both viewpoints in the later period. Whilst large parts of the metropolis were being developed to be more spacious and reflective of polite society, and the older areas of criminal ghettos were being cleaned up, areas of acute deprivation and crime still remained prevalent. London itself was becoming increasingly divided between the East End and the West End, between a waged (or at times welfare dependent) proletariat and a bourgeois or elite propertied class. This coloured how the city, and the criminals within it, were perceived. Increasingly, as the notion of the 'everyman' criminal was being eroded by the press, the citizenry of the eastern sector in particular were looked

²³⁷ Ibid., 384.

²³⁸ R Shoemaker, 'Print Culture', p 7.

²³⁹ Ibid., p 7.

upon with suspicion by the better off in the west. Such perceptions were fuelled by press reportage about crime. Newspapers exaggerated the criminal threat, especially at the end of wars and other times of tension. Although readership of the press covered most social classes, the primary purchasers and consumers were the better off and those with respectable aspirations, like Francis Place. Although publicly maintaining a healthy scepticism about what they read, consumers of newspapers by and large read the newspaper in an uncomplicated way and at face value as shown by the popular reaction to press exaggeration that took the form of moral panics. Although editorial selection processes are difficult to determine precisely, it does seem that the press deliberately chose to emphasise crime because it helped to sell papers in a highly competitive market. However the association between press representation of crime and public perception was a complex one, because newspaper reports may have directly affected the number of crimes being reported and prosecuted, thereby providing the press with yet more copy.

CHAPTER THREE

Stories of Crime and Disorder: Robbery, Burglary and the Press in the 1780s

Introduction

This chapter will provide a detailed examination of the felonies of robbery and burglary using press reports in order to reach a better understanding of these crimes. It will examine the varied forms the offences could take, including the perceived differences between the highwayman and the street robber, the degrees of violence involved in robberies and burglaries, their locations, the types of booty stolen from victims as well as a consideration of the sort of victims apparently targeted by robbers. The chapter will provide a quantitative and qualitative study of the ways in which the London press chose to report these felonies, and it will consider the nature of editorial selection policies and notions of newsworthiness. The chapter will also consider the potential of newspapers to shape popular perceptions of crime as an increasingly serious and intractable social problem and the creation of 'crime waves' and 'moral panics'. Furthermore, it will discuss the press' possible impact on readers' perceptions about the prevalence of crime, the effectiveness and legitimacy of the criminal justice system as well as long term changes in understanding the nature of criminality. Finally the chapter will consider the various ways in which the London newspaper in the late eighteenth century helped specifically shape more modern and nuanced ideas about violent theft than had been provided by earlier, more traditional forms of print.

Methodology

The research for this chapter is based upon a detailed qualitative and quantitative analysis of a sample of five newspapers over five months in each of the years 1780, 1785 and 1790, using the digitised Burney Collection of seventeenth and eighteenth century newspapers held by the British Library, as well as *The Times* Digital Archive. They were selected for their variety, such as daily, evening or tri-weekly publication. The months of August to December were chosen for their seasonal variations in climate and daylight hours as well as employment opportunities. However the same newspapers were not available in all three

of the sample years of the sample years, and the 'Daily Universal Register' (later retitled 'The Times') was not available for the entire month of August 1785. In this instance, the month of July has been substituted for this paper only, and this differential is clearly indicated in the relevant statistical tables. The newspapers selected according to available dates from the 'Morning Post', the 'London Chronicle', the 'Morning Chronicle', the 'Public Advertiser', the 'Whitehall Evening Post', the 'Daily Universal Register'/'The Times' and 'The World'. Details of robbery reports from these journals were then entered on an Excel database. Because of the unreliability of keyword searching, each newspaper was personally scanned for robbery reports which has provided a greater level of accuracy. This has also enabled the stories to be seen in the wider context of the journal as a whole.¹ The details recorded were divided into four broad categories:

(1)Details of the robbery. This included the day, time and location of the crime; the degree of violence used; the number of robbers and whether they were mounted or on foot. The degree of violence was graded between a simple threat, mild violence (for example where the victim was simply 'knocked down'), to the threat of a weapon, extreme violence where perhaps a weapon was used, and attempted or actual murder.

(2)Details of the offender(s). These would include, where provided, their names, gender, occupation, social status and age. The status classification used ranges from the gentry and aristocracy, the professional, commercial and merchant middling classes, to members of the military, skilled workers, tradesmen and farmers to the labouring, unskilled and also beggars. Obviously this information is missing from accounts of unsolved crimes.

(3)Details of the victim(s). These would include the same classifications as the offender category above, with an additional note about whether the victims were travelling as members of a family. Also, if the victim was described as 'Mr' in the report, this was recorded as a separate category.

(4)Following King's research methodology the reports were then classified according to the following categories:

(a) Victim or witness based testimony of an unsolved crime;

¹ In order to analyse the overall structure of crime and justice reporting and the discursive frameworks within it, King's methodology involved a detailed quantitative study of five newspapers' reports of a variety of offences, including highway robbery, burglary, assault, murder and attempted murder. After categorising the reportage into stories of unsolved crimes, arrests, trials and sentencing and general comments on judicial and social policy, reports were further quantified by newspaper title, column length and the percentage of the newshole dedicated to crime and justice stories.

- (b) The legal processes of the apprehension and examination of suspects including whether the offender(s) escaped from the scene of the crime, whether they were subsequently arrested and by whom, be it the victim, a passer-by or a peace officer;
- (c) Details of trials and verdicts;
- (d) Whether the convicted offender was pardoned or executed;
- (e) A comment made upon the robbery by the newspaper.

Attention was also given to elements that may have been especially newsworthy, such as humour or noticeable violence or the social status of either victim or offender as well as the use of language in the account. Reports were also catalogued according to their length: short reports are those of a few lines only; medium length reports are those of approximately half a column in length (around ten lines) and long reports are between half a column and a whole column (or in some exceptional cases, longer than one whole column). Comparison was then made between different titles about levels and types of crime reporting, as well as contrasting coverage over the decade. In these ways the chapter will provide a careful and detailed qualitative and quantitative study of the crime of robbery in late eighteenth century London, and the ways in which the press chose to represent it. Finally the research evidence will be utilised to show how newspapers subtly helped to shape new understandings of the offence and the implications of that for our understanding of crime and criminal justice in this period.

Crime and the London Press

King has argued that the press created ‘a vital repository of ways of thinking’ about crimes and related issues surrounding criminal justice.² Readers of journals such as the *Whitehall Evening Post*

were treated to a fare of violent crime: of footpads stealing watches, wigs and purses from passers-by; of highwaymen haunting the heaths and roads to London and terrorising travellers; of gangs creating sham disturbances in order to commit hit-and-run robberies, or impersonating lightmen in order to entrap theatre-goers.³

² P King, ‘Newspaper Reporting and Attitudes to Crime and Justice in late-eighteenth-and early-nineteenth-century London’, *Continuity and Change* 22 (i), (2007), 75-112 (76).

³ *Ibid.*, 78.

Furthermore newspapers reported robberies in a new and unique way: instead of simply reproducing trial reports (like the *Proceedings of the Old Bailey*), or accounts of highwayman's lives and last words (as did the *Ordinary's Accounts* or numerous biographical pamphlets, collections of 'lives' and dying speeches), newspapers provided *victim's* perspective.⁴ Potentially, this provided an unprecedented degree of reader involvement with print, as well as a sense of immediacy with robberies occurring in 'real time' – yesterday or the day before in many instances. Cindy McCreery has suggested that the press reports surrounding the crimes of the London 'Monster' (a serial offender who derived pleasure from non-lethally stabbing young women), in 1790 were accessible to, and were indeed aimed at the middling class as well as elite society and males as well as females.⁵ This also applies to press reports of robberies and other forms of violent crime. Furthermore, certain moral entrepreneurs, most especially the magistrate half-brothers Henry and John Fielding, saw the value of the press as part of their campaign to reduce immorality and offending. Henry Fielding established the *Covent Garden Journal* and John utilised the pages of the *Public Advertiser* to distribute information about crimes and criminals.⁶ Combined with the expansion of newspapers and their distribution more generally, the public's access to political and social information was fundamentally altered.⁷ Christie has claimed that

[t] there is no doubt ... that most men (sic) who wanted to get information about public affairs from the newspapers could do so, and that the papers reached down to groups fairly low in the social scale.⁸

However all newspapers were founded upon the desire to make money and they had to operate as profit-making businesses.⁹ Because of the profit imperative, journals also felt that

⁴ Newspapers, of course, also reported trials, executions, and biographical details. The *Ordinary's Accounts* had ceased publication by this time. On crime literature see especially Faller, *Turned to Account*, McKenzie, *Tyburn's Martyrs*; Peter Linebaugh. 'The Ordinary of Newgate and His Account', in J S Cockburn (ed), *Crime in England, 1550-1800*, (London: Methuen, 1877), pp 246-269, 348-352. For the significance of victim focused reporting see Esther Snell, 'Perceptions of Violent Crime in Eighteenth – Century England: A Study of Discourses of Homicide, Aggravated Larceny and Sexual Assault in the Eighteenth – Century Newspaper', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Kent at Canterbury, 2004.

⁵ Cindy McCreery, 'A Moral Panic in Eighteenth – Century London? The 'Monster' and the Press', in David Lemmings and Claire Walker (eds), *Moral Panics, the Media and the Law in Early Modern England*, (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp 195-220 (p196).

⁶ Miles Ogborn, *Spaces of Modernity: London's Geographies, 1680-1780* (New York and London: The Guildford Press, 1998), pp 221-223.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp 205-206.

⁸ Ian R Christie, 'British Newspapers in the Later Georgian Age', in Ian R Christie, *Myth and Reality in Late Eighteenth Century British Politics* (London: Macmillan, 1970), pp 311-333 (p325)

⁹ *Ibid.*, p326.

they had to amuse, entertain and even educate and 'improve' their readers. As well as providing details of foreign wars and comments about the lives and activities of statesmen and other leading personages, the London press showed a keen interest in the more trivial happenings in the capital and to the activities of the less exalted citizens of the metropolis.¹⁰ Contemporary Eustace Budgell complained that the domestic news content of London newspapers was largely restricted to

Robberies, bloody Murders, Accounts of Drayman's Carts that have run over People, with the Adventures of Pot-Boys, Tide-Waiters, and Messengers, etc. The Promotions, Deaths, and Marriages of the Nobility, Gentry and Clergy, and of the Days when some of the Royal Family go to the Play House, or take the Air ...¹¹

The fact that crime and justice narratives were (and remain) popular items for public entertainment and speculation tends to blur the dividing line between fact and fiction.¹² Robert Reiner quotes from two studies of crime reporting in the modern media, but the comments are equally appropriate to news coverage in the late eighteenth-century. The first comment notes that

Crime stories in newspapers consist primarily of brief accounts of discrete events, with few details and little background material.

The second study concluded that

Mass media provide citizens with a public awareness of crime ... based upon an information-rich and knowledge-poor foundation. Anyone interested in reading about crime from the mass media is treated to examples, incidents, and scandals but at such a level of description that it is impossible for them to develop an analytical comprehension of crime.¹³

If we are to understand the felonies of robbery and burglary as it was experienced by contemporaries, it is important to know not just how the press reported the offence, but also whether their descriptive accounts reflect the social realities of the crimes or whether they were shaped more by commercial or cultural factors. It is also necessary to take into account the strengths and weaknesses of the newspaper as a medium for transmitting

¹⁰ G A Cranfield, *The Development of the Provincial Newspaper, 1700-1760* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), pp 70-71.

¹¹ Ibid., pp 70-71.

¹² Robert Reiner, 'Media Made Criminality: the Representation of Crime in the Mass Media', in Mike Maguire, Rod Morgan and Robert Reiner (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Criminology* 2nd edn., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp 189-231 (p 194).

¹³ Ibid., pp 201-202.

accurate information about crime and justice. Devereaux has reminded us that

no primary source produced for public consumption can ever be regarded as an unproblematic pathway into the history of eighteenth-century criminal justice. Every source is a unique product of the prevailing tensions and conflicting priorities of its time, and we must go at least some way toward comprehending these tensions and priorities in order to use such sources responsibly. In short, we must be sensitive to the fact of our sources being, themselves, historical artefacts.¹⁴

But are press reports a better, more accurate guide to the incidence of robberies? Scholars such as Beattie have used court records in an attempt to discern trends over time, and this is the approach most scholars have followed. Obtaining an accurate assessment of 'real' levels of offending is problematic regardless of the primary source used, and some of the same limitations apply to court records that relate to press accounts. Especially problematic is the issue of the 'dark figure' of unreported/unprosecuted offending that is unknowable. Patrick Colquhoun claimed in 1797 that '[it is] not one in one hundred offences that is discovered or prosecuted'.¹⁵ Often newspapers chose to generalise about the high numbers of violent thefts at certain periods. In December 1790 the *World* alarmed its readers by proclaiming that

The robberies that are nightly committed are truly alarming, and render it dangerous to walk after dusk on any of the roads in the environs of the metropolis.¹⁶

By Christmas the *Public Advertiser* was warning readers that there was 'a legion of nocturnal depredators' in London to whom a 'sober citizen is ... a valuable acquisition'. The newspaper counselled that 'it would be prudent in all well-disposed citizens to avoid being out late at night' when attending the season's festivities, but issued the perennial despair that to 'the young, the gay, the volatile, all caution is useless; they are too wise to accept advice and therefore must take the consequences'.¹⁷ In the newspaper sample from the years 1780, 1785 and 1790 there were 591 accounts of violent thefts, 232 clearly involving mounted highwaymen and a further 359 were footpad or other threatening robberies,

¹⁴ Simon Devereaux, 'The City and the Sessions Paper: "Public Justice" in London, 1770-1800', *Journal of British Studies* 35 (4) (October 1996), 466-503 (503).

¹⁵ J Mokyr, *The Enlightened Economy. An Economic History of Britain, 1700-1850* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), p 402.

¹⁶ *World* 3 December 1790.

¹⁷ *Public Advertiser* 27 December 1790.

describing 152 highway and 267 street robberies. These figures have been broken down by date in Figures 3.1 and 3.2 (below).

Newspaper Reports of Unsolved Robberies : July/August-Dec 1780, 1785, 1790 by Year

Figure 3.1a Highway Robbery

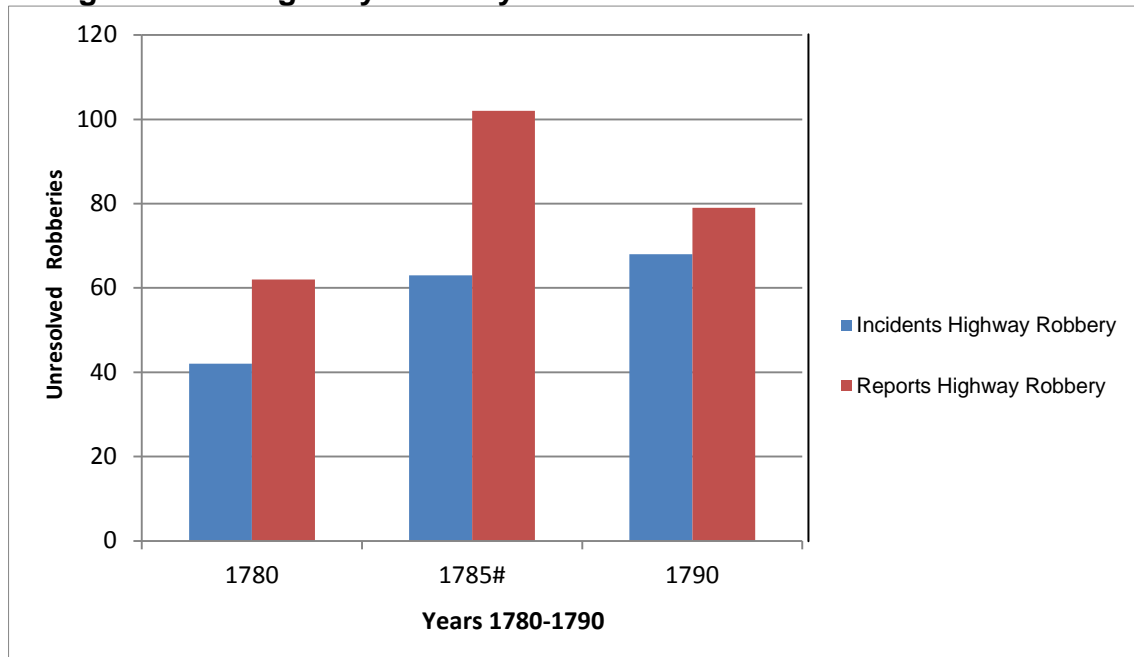


Figure 3.1b Street Robbery



Source: according to availability: *The Times/Daily Universal Register, Morning Post, London Chronicle; Morning Chronicle; Public Advertiser; Whitehall Evening Post; World*; July/Aug-Dec 1780, 1785 and 1790. # July T/DUR only

Newspaper Reports of Unsolved Robberies: July/August-Dec 1780, 1785, 1790 by month

Figure 3.2a Highway Robbery

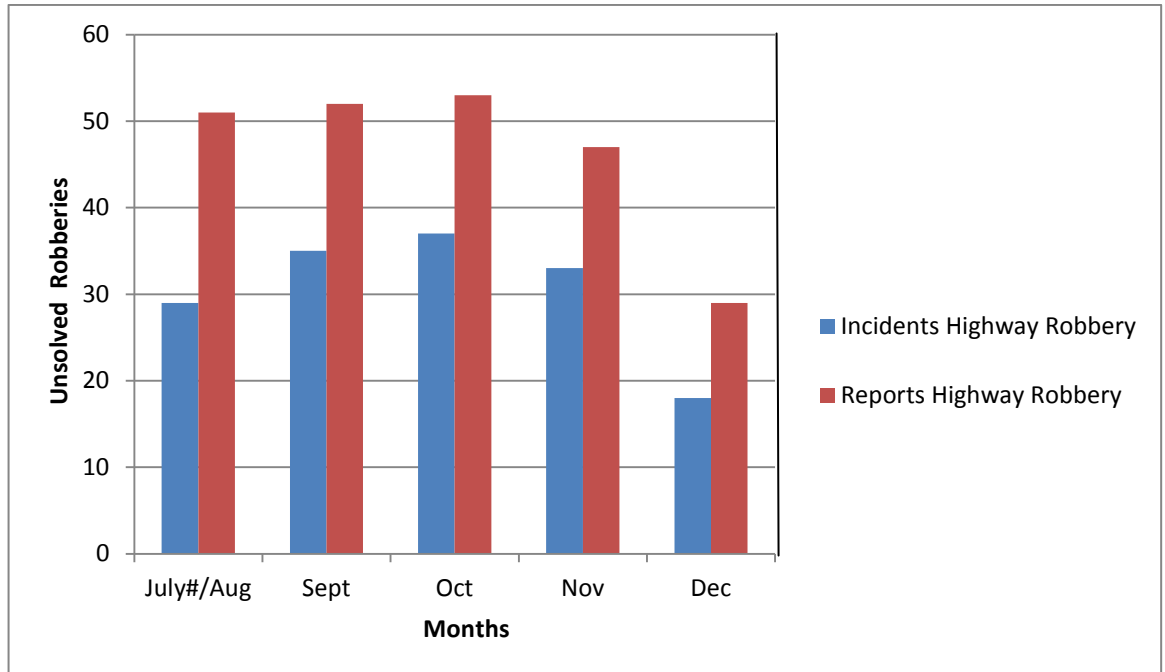
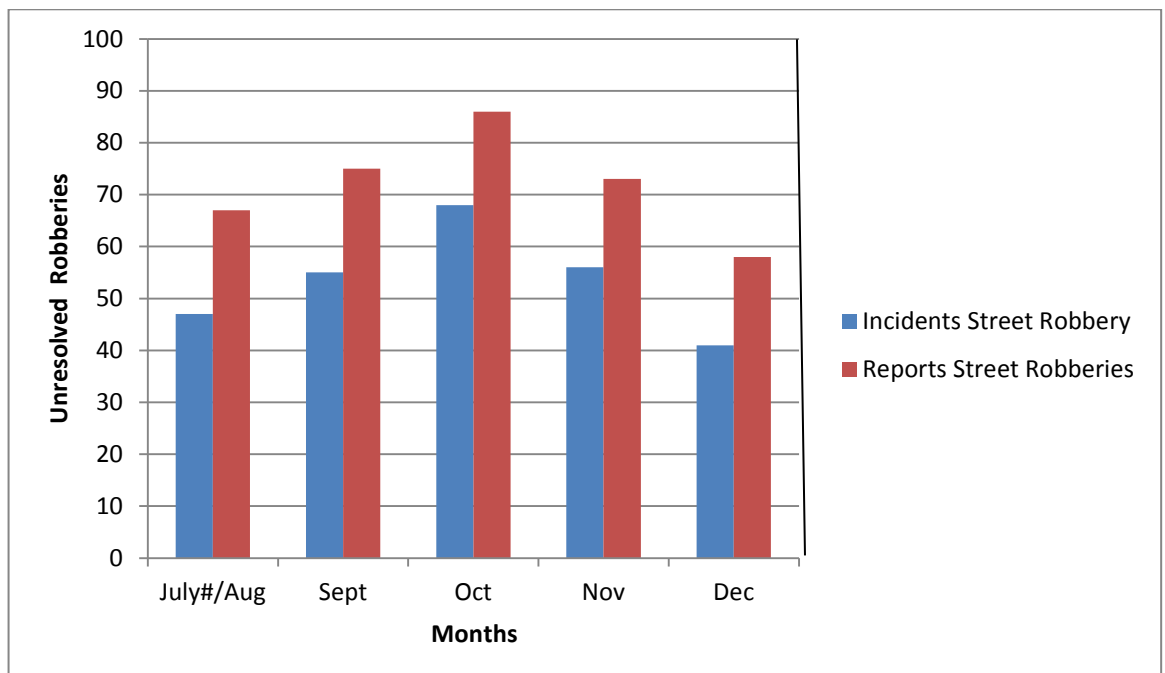


Figure 3.2b Street Robbery

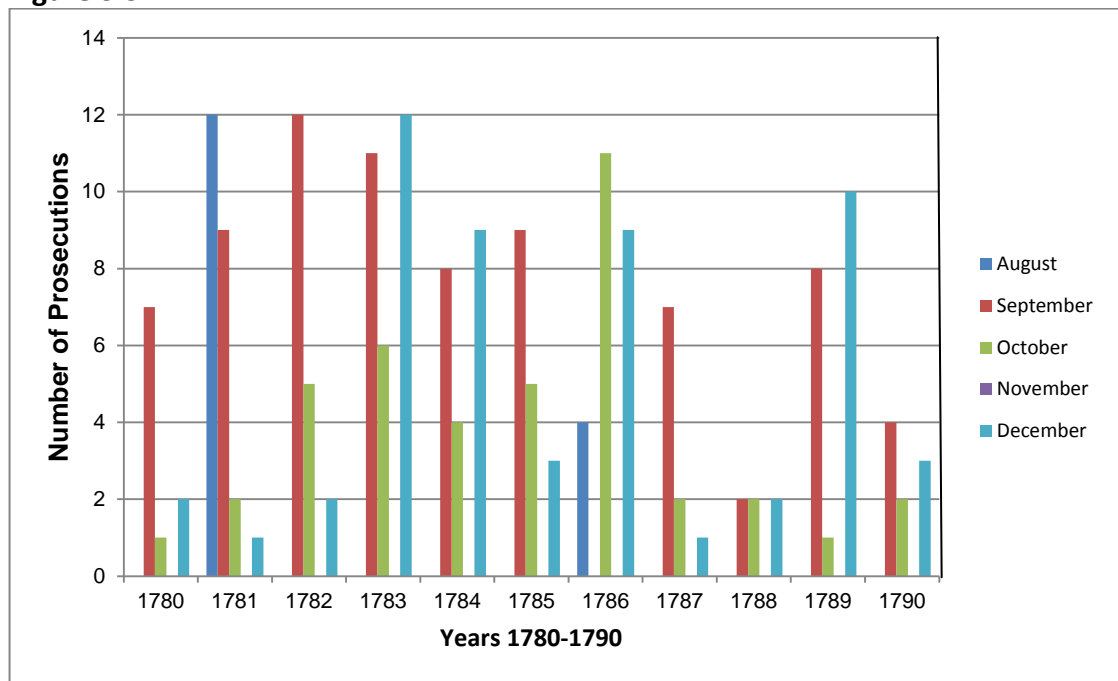


Source: according to availability: *The Times/Daily Universal Register; Morning Post; London Chronicle; Morning Chronicle; Public Advertiser; Whitehall Evening Post; World*; July/Aug-Dec 1780, 1785 and 1790. # July T/DUR only

The figures clearly show considerable variations in the number of reports appearing in newspapers of highway and street robberies in the metropolitan area, whether these are assessed by month or by year. They also reveal that footpad robberies, which were generally regarded as the most feared form of violent theft, were considerably more frequent occurrences over the whole period than highway robberies. Jeremy Pocklington has questioned the capacity of 'subjective' newspaper reports of highway robberies to provide accurate accounts of highway theft when compared to court records.¹⁸

Prosecutions for robbery at the Old Bailey, 1780-90

Figure 3.3



Source: *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*

Figure 3.3 provides the figures of prosecutions at the Old Bailey for all categories of violent robbery over the decade. It is clear that there were far fewer prosecutions for this offence at the Old Bailey compared to the number of robberies reported in the press. (Prosecutions leading to convictions were, of course, even fewer). In addition to the Old Bailey (which heard cases arising from the City of London, Westminster and the County of Middlesex), trials for felonies occurring in London south of the River Thames were held at the Surrey assizes. Indictments for robberies were strongest in the county's most urbanised districts. Between 1660 and 1800 the borough of Southwark had around a fifth of Surrey's robbery

¹⁸ J Pocklington, 'Highway Robbery in London, 1660-c 1720. Practices, Policies and Perceptions'. (unpublished M Phil dissertation, University of Oxford, 1997), pp 15-16.

indictments, and most of the rest were in nearby Lambeth and Camberwell as well as Rotherhithe, Clapton, Newington and Deptford. A further twelve per cent covered the parishes of Putney, Wimbledon, Croydon and Kingston.¹⁹ Furthermore, another district with borders adjoining London, the county of Essex, indictments for highway robbery comprised only 6.4% of property crime indictments between 1748 and 1767 and 5.5% in the period from 1791 to 1800. This compares with 61.8% and 66.4% respectively for grand and petty larceny.²⁰ Despite the reservations already expressed, newspapers are therefore better indicators of the incidence, as well as the variety, of robberies in the London area at this time because so few cases ever came to court. Court cases can only provide information about those cases that were detected *and* prosecuted, and these may be untypical of robberies as a whole. Some victims would have chosen to settle out of court, perhaps satisfied with the simple return of their property, adequate compensation or an apology. Others may have not had the determination, spare time or cash to finance either the detection or prosecution. However this relatively small number of cases fails to indicate any trends in the nature and character of robbery, or critically how Londoners experienced such violent attacks. There are, however, problems with the use of newspapers as a source to ascertain levels of offending, especially the apparent 'crime wave' in 1785.

No single newspaper could, or even attempted, to print details of every single robbery (or any other offence for that matter). There were simply too many thefts taking place and these had to compete for space with the other topics. Esther Snell has shown that the Canterbury-based newspaper, *The Kentish Post*, attempted to dedicate a fairly strict but regular proportion of the paper to crime and justice reporting.²¹ Despite the high level of plagiarism of crime and justice stories in all newspapers, no single journal reported the same, identical robbery accounts which appeared in their rivals' publications. The differing number of reported offences may simply reflect differing editorial selection policies about what was considered newsworthy, or may indicate a shortage of other types of news stories suitable for publication. Stories about robberies could become monotonous if too similar to each other. *The Times*, for example, informed its readers in March 1790 after reporting a highway robbery trial at the Old Bailey that 'several other prisoners were convicted of larcenies but none of a nature sufficiently interesting to merit insertion.'²²

¹⁹ Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, pp 158-159.

²⁰ King, *Crime, Justice and Discretion*, p 137.

²¹ Snell, 'Perceptions'.

²² King, 'Making crime news', 97

Crime reporting would normally be reduced if there was more exciting news, such as informative stories originating in France towards the end of our period.²³ Therefore, it is difficult to conclude that the number of robbery reports in the press directly relates to the number of robberies taking place in London at this time. News reports of robberies and other crimes were frequently used as 'fillers' by editors: if there was a small gap on the page of the news journal, a robbery account was sufficiently accommodating to allow itself to be contracted or expanded, whilst still holding the interest of the reader. A newspaper was required to be as 'full as an egg': if it was not, it would have been an embarrassment to the editor, and the reader may have felt cheated or short-changed.²⁴

Were the crimes reported in the press typical and representative of offending as a whole? As a general rule the press prioritised stories involving violence, especially extreme violence, and King's study shows that in 1786 and 1790 highway robbery trials at the Old Bailey were about three times more likely to be reported than cases of simple larceny.²⁵ Furthermore, Gatrell's claim that crowds at executions favoured those who were the least like themselves may also be true of those who read newspapers (or at least editors' perceptions of what their readers desired).²⁶ Gatrell suggests that footpads should be included in this group. (This assertion, however, leads one to wonder which demographic sector identified with highwaymen who were frequently reported upon). Furthermore, during periods of peace or at times when parliament was not sitting, crime reports were used to enliven an insipid paper. On occasion, this may have encouraged some newspapers to have taken a rather cavalier approach. In a text that has been attributed to Daniel Defoe the author complained that

On a sudden we found street-robberies became the common practice, conversation was full of the variety of them, the newspapers had them every day, and sometimes more than were ever committed; and those that were committed were set off by the invention of the writers, with so many particulars, and so many more than were ever heard of by the persons robbed, that made the facts be matter of entertainment, and either pleasant or formidable, as the authors thought fit, and perhaps, sometimes, made formal robberies, *in nubibus*, to furnish out amusements for their readers.²⁷

²³ King, 'Making crime news', 95.

²⁴ Black, *English Press*, ch 2.

²⁵ King, 'Making crime news', 98-99.

²⁶ V A C Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree. Execution and the English People, 1770-1868* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, paperback edition, 1996), pp 100-102.

²⁷ [Daniel Defoe?], *A Brief Historical Account of the Lives of Six Notorious Street Robbers*, quoted by Hal Gladfelder, *Criminality and Narrative in Eighteenth-Century England* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2001), pp244-245 n 15.

Crime reports could be used to boost sales. In 1765, when the *Chelmsford Chronicle* was fighting for its life in a bitter circulation with its rival, the *Ipswich Journal*, it chose to report and comment upon a growing number of robberies in the Colchester area.²⁸ Although better indicators of robberies in the 1780s, newspaper accounts of robberies in the 1780s do not necessarily reflect the true level of offending on the streets of the capital or the roads leading into London.

Press reports may have contained inaccuracies or been embellished or even be totally fictitious. These are universal limitations of all types of newspaper reportage, past and present. Given the limitations imposed by poor communications and limited technology, it was extremely difficult for the eighteenth century writer or editor to fully ascertain the truthfulness and accuracy of their sources, especially those accounts that came direct from victims or witnesses. Such items were inevitably highly subjective and furthermore those providing much of the gritty detail were not on oath (as they would have been in court). Neither were their stories open to challenge: in trials at the Old Bailey, for example, those giving evidence were questioned whether the daylight was sufficient, or they were sober enough to successfully identify their assailant.²⁹

However, the value of press reportage does not entirely depend upon its capacity to provide accurate and unbiased accounts. Newspapers help us to understand the nature of perception: how people saw the incidence and characteristics of crime and how they and the authorities responded to it. Contemporaries, of course, were not able to analyse crime figures in an objective statistical fashion to determine the 'rate' of offending as modern scholars attempt to do. Rather, their perceptions were shaped by the numbers of offences and trials and the length of gaol calendars that they read about in newspapers, pamphlets and trial reports.³⁰ Some of the increase in offending in the later eighteenth century can be accounted for simply by the increase in the capital's population.³¹ Therefore as Beattie suggests: 'even a small number of incidents reported in the press can create an impression of extreme danger'.³² Therefore if certain types of crime, such as robbery, are disproportionately represented, and then skewed towards higher levels of violence, newspaper reports can have a considerable impact at causing anxiety and fear, and lead to

²⁸ Peter King, 'Newspaper Reporting, Prosecution Practice and Perceptions of Urban Crime: the Colchester Crime Wave of 1765', *Continuity and Change* 2 (3) (1987), 423-454. We lack sales figures for the London press, but the same situation probably applies to London newspapers.

²⁹ OBSP

³⁰ Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, p213.

³¹ Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, p213.

³² Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, p218.

demands for radical action to solve the perceived problem. Richard Ward's research on print and crime in mid-eighteenth-century London has shown a striking correlation between crime reporting in the press and rates of prosecution in courts of all levels. When newspapers printed higher numbers of crime stories, exaggerating the scale of violent offences (when compared with the actual levels of offending proved in the courts), and accompanied with highly inflammatory language in reportage and commentary, it was found that levels of prosecution increased. Although these changes are not automatically a case of cause and effect, it is sufficiently remarkable to conclude that it is highly likely that there is some degree of statistical relationship between them.³³ The nature of the dilemma is aptly stated by Beattie:

It remains a question, of course, whether the levels of prosecution are a reflection of real events in the world – a real increase in theft and robberies and burglaries – or simply a reflection of public anxiety, of the changing propensity of victims of offenses to report and prosecute and of the authorities to encourage them. It could be both.³⁴

War and peacetime offending

The supposed differences between war and peacetime offending further complicate the picture. Scholars have pointed to a co-relationship between periods of war and peace and levels of offending, or, more accurately, levels of prosecution. Indictments in urban Surrey, for example, were far fewer in times of war – 1739-48, 1756-63, 1776-82, and 1793-1815. Declarations of peace led to a marked increase in prosecutions that tended to last until the outbreak of another war.³⁵ Thus Horace Walpole explained to Thomas Mann in 1750 that 'you will hear little news from England, but of robberies' because of 'the numbers of disbanded soldiers [who] have all taken to the road, or rather to the street'.³⁶ The usual explanation for this phenomenon is that there was a decline in offending in periods of war due to the removal of large numbers of young men for military service overseas, a group most commonly associated with crime, and labour markets became less crowded in war time. Upon their return, the demobilised troops, who had been brutalised by their experience of war, returned home to face an overcrowded labour market. There were very specific reasons for fearing the return of the military and a rise in highway robberies: active duty in the cavalry taught men horsemanship, as well as the skills to use a cutlass or pistol –

³³ Richard Michael Ward, *Print Culture and Responses to Crime in Mid-Eighteenth-Century London* (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Sheffield, 2010), chapter 3.

³⁴ Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, p 218.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p 215.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p226.

skills useful to highwaymen. The army also engendered the benefits arising from comradeship and bravery.³⁷ However, Rogers has argued that commentators, whilst acknowledging the potential for mass demobilisation to glut existing labour markets, nevertheless tended to marginalise unemployed soldiers and sailors as a major cause of the increase in offending.³⁸ This perception was shared by justices who were often prepared to offer young male suspects the opportunity to serve in the armed forces rather than face trial.³⁹ The link was made most forcibly in the press. In peace-time, perhaps because of a shortage of news caused by the cessation of hostilities, newspapers started reporting more incidents of robbery and other offences, exaggerating the violence involved and would comment on the direct link of the crime wave to the demobilisation of troops.⁴⁰ Historians have drawn attention to the fact that increased reporting of violent offences by the press tended to anticipate the arrival of the troops on British soil or even formal cessation of war. The American Wars (1776 and 1782) had kept the capital relatively at peace, and in 1780 crime reporting in the London press was significantly lower than it was to be in 1785 after the return of the armed services. There was, however, a further cause for public anxiety during this period. The availability of transportation to America as punishment for offenders had been abruptly terminated in 1776 with the outbreak of war. After the war, when offending began to increase once again, gaols became overcrowded with those awaiting trial and those who had already been sentenced. In 1785 the Solicitor-General noted 'the alarming height' of 'depredations', and even those who opposed the Police Bill of that year acknowledged that 'thieves and rogues of all denominations had increased to an almost incredible number'.⁴¹ The mayor and aldermen of the City of London petitioned the King in 1786, complaining that there were 'great numbers of experienced and well-practised thieves' due to the ending of transportation. Such claims fuelled public anxiety because at some time in the future, these prisoners would be released back into the community and (potentially) reoffend.⁴² As a result there were a huge number of hangings in the mid-1780s; according to John Beattie this was 'to be in effect the last large-scale effort of terror to prevent men from robbing and stealing'.⁴³

³⁷ Ibid., p 227. However Emsley has largely debunked the myth of the brutalised veteran: C Emsley, 'The "brutalised veteran" and violence in Europe after the Great War', in Efi Avdela, Shani D'Cruze and Judith Rowbotham (eds), *Problems of Crime and Violence in Europe, 1780-2000: Essays in Criminal Justice* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press), pp 43-64; idem., *Soldier, Sailor, Beggarman, Thief: Crime and the British Armed Services since 1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

³⁸ Rogers, 'Confronting the Crime Wave', p 83.

³⁹ Rogers, 'Confronting the Crime Wave', p 83.

⁴⁰ Ward, 'Print Culture', p 57.

⁴¹ King, *Crime, Justice and Discretion*, p 159.

⁴² Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, p 225.

⁴³ Ibid., p 224.

Moral panics

However there are a very different batch of newspaper reports about highwaymen and footpads emanating from the ostensibly anti-Catholic Gordon Riots in the summer of 1780. This was a very distinct kind of panic: the authorities lost control of the capital for six days when the rioters not only looted but also set fire to Newgate gaol, releasing its prisoners as well as destroying and releasing inmates from other prisons in the metropolis.⁴⁴ This was a panic felt most keenly by the ruling, propertied elite. In their anxiety to deal with robbers following the Gordon Riots the authorities focused upon recapturing the highwaymen, footpads and burglars who had been released from London's prisons, especially Newgate. The press acted as agents of the propertied upper and middling classes, and were always willing to emphasise the successful arrests and subsequent examinations by magistrates, presenting favourable accounts of how the authorities were dealing with the aftermath of the crisis. The newspaper accounts were clearly designed to reassure the better off who had suffered such losses at the hands of the mob. This was especially the case when the escapees had returned to robbery whose recapture was presented in great detail.

Clearly newspaper reportage about crime and criminals in the 1780s reflect the variety and flexibility of the London press. On the one hand there are the accounts of the arrests and examinations of suspected or convicted robbers released by the rioters in 1780 which were clearly designed to reassure readers that the authorities were in charge of the situation. But in the general anxiety caused by the mid-decade crime wave, press reports of numerous robberies in the London area that were apparently unsolved only served to unsettle the minds of Londoners. Both categories of report may provide a distorted impression of the 'real' levels of offending for the felony of violent theft. However how the crime reportage was *actually* received is by and large speculative: Rowe suggests that the 'hypodermic syringe' impression of media consumption whereby ordinary people simply 'absorb' the messages presented to them simply fails to account for the uneven reception of crime stories by the public.⁴⁵

Crime Reports: Highway Robbery

Newspaper accounts of crimes fall into several distinct categories: descriptions of unsolved crimes where the evidence would most likely have been provided directly by the victim(s)

⁴⁴ Christopher Hibbert, *King Mob* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2004); see also Shoemaker, *London Mob*, passim.

⁴⁵ David Rowe, 'The Concept of the Moral Panic: An Historical-Sociological Positioning', in Lemmings and Walker, *Moral Panics*, pp 22-40 (pp 27-28).

or witnesses, reports of examinations of defendants by justices of the peace, accounts of trials and notifications of executions (see figure 3.4 below). There were no significant statistical differences between the categories of report in the period covered between different titles. It is clear that unsolved robbery reports based upon victim or witness direct testimony formed between approximately two thirds and four fifths of press reports about robberies. Most importantly, this is the type of report that is the least open to independent verification. Although they provide an opportunity for misrepresentation they are also the primary accounts which are nearest to the actual robbery and were given when memories were at their freshest and the reports often provide a vividness in the detail they recall. Nevertheless these accounts by their very nature can provide very little information about the assailants other than vague generalisations about their appearance.

Despite the difficulties in attributing guilt in unsolved robbery accounts, this did not prevent the press from printing details that were basically purely speculative. In essence, papers appear to have tailored their reports around those features of robbery that caused the most fear. The press frequently used emotive and highly inflammatory language. Thus the *World* commented in December 1790 that

The robberies that are nightly committed are truly alarming and render it dangerous to walk after dusk on any of the roads in the environs of the metropolis.⁴⁶

Robbers are invariably 'villains' who 'infest' certain districts. In December 1790 one newspaper warned their readers that

It would be prudent in all well disposed citizens to avoid being out late at night [despite the Christmas celebrations because] ... They well know that a legion of nocturnal depredators are upon the watch and to meet with a sober citizen is to them a valuable acquisition.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ *World* 3 December 1790.

⁴⁷ *Public Advertiser* 27 December 1790

**Breakdown of newspaper reports about robbery
July/Aug-Dec, 1780, 1785, 1790**

Figure 3.4a

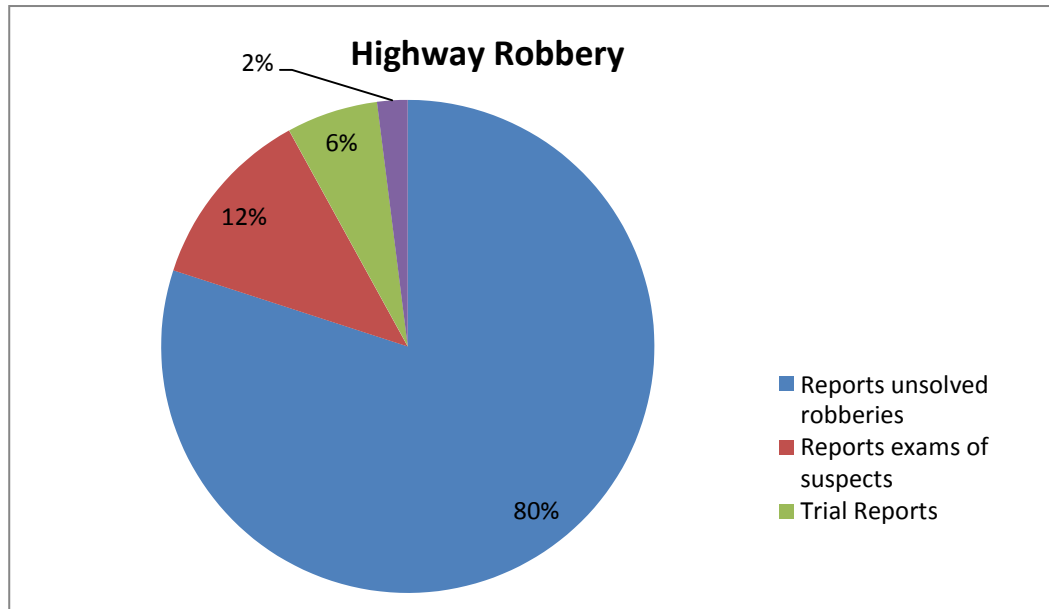
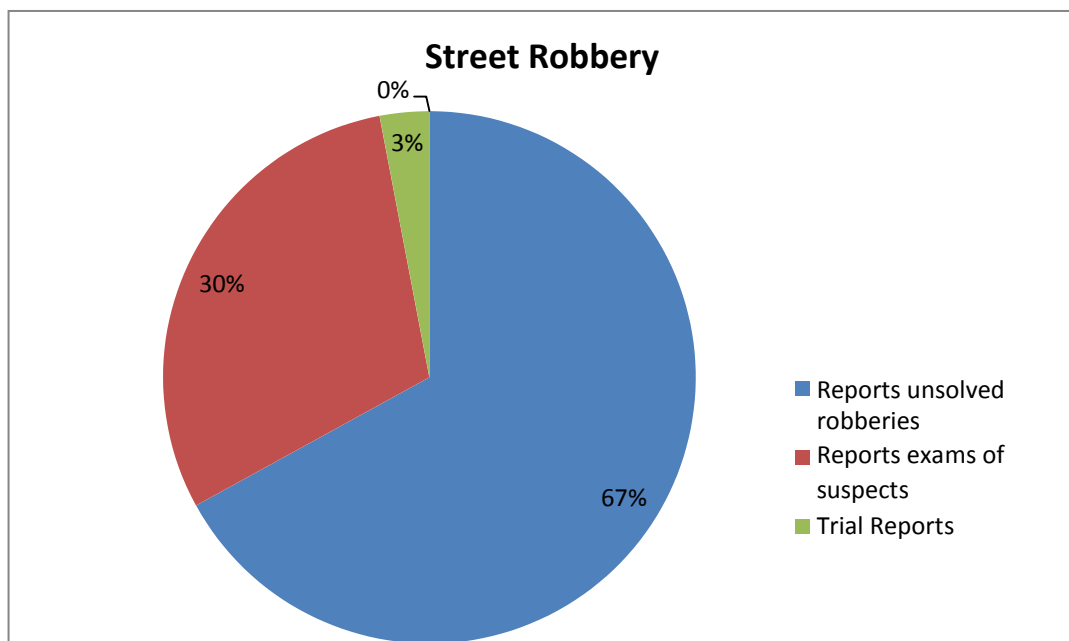


Figure 3.4b



Source: according to availability: *The Times/Daily Universal Register; Morning Post; London Chronicle; Morning Chronicle; Public Advertiser; Whitehall Evening Post; World*; July/Aug-Dec 1780, 1785 and 1790.

Thus the press demonised footpads and highwaymen, emphasising their otherness: at times they were like vermin or wild animals or else they operated with the strengths of an army. These accounts frequently allude to the existence of multiple robberies by gangs, many of whom had been (allegedly) in the military, were motivated by poverty and prepared to kill out of desperation. Newspapers frequently claimed that highwaymen and footpads were responsible for multiple robberies without providing any evidence or proof to support their assertion. George Ghent, Esquire, for example, was robbed by three highwaymen on Clapham Common in November 1780. The *London Chronicle* noted that '[t]hree other carriages were robbed the same evening, supposed by the same men'.⁴⁸ In the summer of the same year the paper reported that several carriages had been robbed by 'a single highwayman with a crepe over his face; the same person is supposed to have committed the robberies about Tooting, Merton and Carshalton'.⁴⁹ Within a few days the newspaper reported that 'three fellows have lately infested Mile End, Stepney, and Bethnal Green, and committed sundry robberies. Last Sunday they robbed Mr Gimbert of Bethnal Green and Mr Seacome of Tottenham Court Road, about eight o' clock at night'.⁵⁰ The nature of these reports suggests the existence of either professional or semi-professional gangs of highwaymen operating in the greater London area. This was a firm belief held by many commentators at the time and may have been influenced by newspaper accounts and direct commentary similar to those above. The *Public Advertiser*, during a perceived crime wave in November 1785, claimed that it was necessary for the military to patrol the roads within a ten mile radius of the capital because of '[t]he daily robberies committed by six, eight and ten men in a gang' which, the paper complained, was ample proof 'to justify Mr Alderman Townsend's assertion that there are more than two thousand well known persons who exist entirely by their depredations on the public'. The paper further claimed that 'such a herd of villains are suffered to rove abroad with impunity' clearly indicated 'a defect in our laws, or of carrying them into execution'.⁵¹

There is some evidence that there were criminal gangs operating in early eighteenth-century London and newspaper reports suggest that this practice continued into the latter half of the eighteenth century. In November 1785 the *Public Advertiser* reported that

The Long – Lane gang are become daring in the extreme and there is strong reason to surmise it has been a branch of this gang that has late committed so many robberies.⁵²

⁴⁸ *London Chronicle* 25 November 1780.

⁴⁹ *London Chronicle* 17 August 1780.

⁵⁰ *London Chronicle* 22 August 1780

⁵¹ *Public Advertiser* 22 November 1785.

⁵² *Public Advertiser* 18 November 1785.

Groups of criminals did not necessarily limit their actions to violent theft on the highway. When three men attempted to break into the South Lambeth home of Mr Lynes, a jeweller in the Strand, Lynes fired upon them seriously hurting one member of the group. Eventually the villains were forced to depart. The next day Lynes received a letter informing him of the injury of their colleague, threatening revenge if he died. The newspaper report continued

According to the above promise, Mr Lynes was way-laid last Saturday evening, just beyond Vauxhall turnpike by two men, one of whom threw snuff in his face, and afterwards stabbed him in the side, and the other knocked him down; then thinking they had effected their purpose, both made their escape.

The paper added that recent robberies in South Lambeth were believed to have been carried out 'by the same gang, one of whom was seen going down the village at noon-day with a man-trap he had stolen out of Mr B White's grounds.'⁵³ The report included an account of a failed street robbery which, with the example above 'sufficiently evince the necessity of some vigorous exertions, and the want of a better system of Police'. In this chilling incident the newspaper described how a gang would coordinate their activities. As a man was crossing Nicoll's Square into Well Street, near Aldersgate, at about six pm on Sunday, he

was stopped by a footpad, who demanded his money; upon his refusing to deliver, two others immediately came up, who, with the first, directly stabbed him with long knives, particularly in the face, shoulder, arm, breast and leg, and afterwards pulled him down, with an intention of rifling his pockets...

Fortunately the anonymous victim's cries were sufficient to attract the attention of nearby residents and drinkers from a public house and his assailants ran off empty-handed.⁵⁴ Highwaymen were, perhaps, the group of offenders most associated with criminal gangs by contemporaries and this may have been one of the main reasons why violent public theft was treated so seriously. Furthermore the ruling elite, and especially the Bow Street magistrates Henry and John Fielding, were vociferous in their belief that criminal gangs were one of the most intractable problems in London.⁵⁵ Contemporaries believed that being a member of a criminal fraternity condemned an individual to a life of crime from

⁵³ *London Chronicle* 19 November 1785.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁵ Heather Shore, 'Criminality, Deviance and the Underworld since 1750', in Anne-Marie Kilday and David Nash (eds), *Histories of Crime: Britain, 1600-2000* (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp 120-140 (pp 122-123).

which the only escape was the noose. Writing the life of condemned prisoner John Jennings in 1742, the Ordinary of Newgate reflected that only the gallows could save the nineteen-year old from committing further iniquities. He wrote that ‘having once enter’d into a Gang, if any one breaks off, they have another’s Life in their Power, giving Informations against their wicked Companions, and then they become Evidences for the King, and hang one another’. However once embarked on a life of crime with criminal associates, only the gallows could save a wretch because ‘they were made a Property of, by every Villain that knows or guesses at [their] Circumstance’ and therefore open to blackmail.⁵⁶ This observation helps us to understand why gangs were a much feared component of popular mentalities about crime, but it seems that it was an exaggerated consternation. It is most likely that, as James Sharpe has argued, such partnerships may have had a very small core of permanent gang members but

despite contemporary imaginings, [gangs] were normally fairly small, and ... were fairly loose associations, with members splitting off and forming subgroups, with peripheral contacts being called in as occasion demanded.⁵⁷

The belief in criminal companies also implies the existence of a criminal ‘underworld’. Historians are rightly concerned at the use of such an emotive phrase which is, perhaps, primarily a journalistic cliché rather than a term of historical debate. An ‘underworld’ assumes there are certain locations where criminals can thrive with relative safety and plan their depredations upon the virtuous, innocent public. Such claims appear to have been made for most periods in history, including the sixteenth century.⁵⁸ J J Tobias posited the existence of such a criminal society in nineteenth-century London, but his argument, as many scholars have subsequently noted, was largely based upon the somewhat impressionistic literary sources he used at the expense of archival research.⁵⁹ There is little convincing evidence for the existence of a criminal underworld in London in the 1780s, although pamphlets about crime by social entrepreneurs hinted at its existence. Newspapers did, however, sometimes indicate that highwaymen knew, respected and cooperated with each other. In October 1780 Mr Thompson of Coleman Street was robbed by two highwaymen near the Shepherd and Shepherdess public house. After taking his gold watch and money they told him ‘if he should be stopped again to say “he had just seen

⁵⁶ McKenzie, *Tyburn’s Martyrs*, pp 64-65.

⁵⁷ Sharpe, *Turpin*, p 104.

⁵⁸ Gamini Salgado *The Elizabethan Underworld* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1977).

⁵⁹ J J Tobias, *Crime and Industrial Society in the Nineteenth Century* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972); Clive Emsley *Crime and Society in England, 1750-1900* (Harlow: Longman, 4th edn. 2010), p 30.

Capt. Timbo', thereby providing immunity from further depredations.⁶⁰ Press reports could be used to advance such an argument, although the existence of an underworld dedicated to crime was not a major concern of the press in the 1780s. There was no concept of investigative journalism; no newspaper was reliant upon 'scoops' or 'exclusives'. By and large, the press simply attempted to report on events, leaving readers to draw their own conclusions. Newspapers liked to report their suspicions that assailants in robberies were possibly servicemen or ex-servicemen. In November 1785, M'Lane, a Scottish pedlar, was robbed of £7 12 shillings somewhere between Acton and Shepherd's Bush 'by four fellows in sailor's jackets'.⁶¹ In the same month John Jenkins, Malachi Bethrington and Isaac Marshall were committed for violently assaulting and robbing Elizabeth Amos. Both the *Public Advertiser* and the *Whitehall Evening Post* noted that 'We are told the above fellows travelled the country as beggars, appearing like lame sailors'.⁶² Anxieties could also happen in years of war. On the evening of October 20 1780 three gentlemen were robbed of their money and watches at Birch Wood near Farningham by seven footpads. The crime was of 'so atrocious a nature' that a reward of £20 was offered for their apprehension and conviction. The *Public Advertiser* described the offenders as 'supposed to belong to the Camp at Dartford, they being dressed in white Jackets turned up with Yellow, and round caps'.⁶³ These may have been the same soldiers who in August 1780 had violently robbed three gentlemen near Dartford. In this instance the offenders were described as 'seven desperate fellows'. A newspaper recorded that 'Three or four of them were dressed in white jackets faced with buff, the others in regimental coats faced likewise with buff. They had all their white foraging caps on, and one of them had his firelock with him'.⁶⁴ In this case, anxieties might have been heightened by the devastating Gordon Riots earlier in the summer, when the London authorities lost control of the capital and the prisons were attacked and prisoners set free.⁶⁵ The troops in these cases were all serving in the armed forces. The press however tended to single out soldiers and sailors as robbers only after they had been disbanded. In December 1790 the *Public Advertiser* contained a lengthy article on the 'state of crimes and punishment' for the year. Noting 'a record low number' of only twenty eight executions and a number of pardons, the paper concluded that

The decrease in *trials* this year may very properly be ascribed to the

⁶⁰ *London Chronicle* 28 October 1780.

⁶¹ *Times/Daily Universal Register* 9 November 1785.

⁶² *Public Advertiser* 26 November 1785; *Whitehall Evening Post* 26 November 1785.

⁶³ *Public Advertiser* 20 October 1780.

⁶⁴ *London Chronicle* 19 August 1780

⁶⁵ On the Gordon Riots see Christopher Hibbert, *King Mob* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2004) and Robert Shoemaker, *London Mob, passim*

employment procured (against their wills, indeed) for many of our vagrants &c to and about London on board the Navy. All the Old Bailey records shew that during a war the number of trials and convictions greatly falls short of that during peace – a circumstance which we have again and again repeated as holding out the strongest necessity for finding some employment for disbanded soldiers and sailors that is honest and may preserve them from idleness, want and vices which lead them to an untimely end.⁶⁶

Although the numbers of the different categories of newspaper reports (unsolved robberies, examinations of suspects by justices, trial reports, execution reports) remained broadly consistent throughout the 1780s sample of papers, the amount of column space given to stories about robbery varied considerably (see Table 3.1 below).

Table 3.1

Column space dedicated to robbery stories in 1780, 1785 and 1790

Year	A few sentences only	Up to ¼ column	Up to ½ column	Over ½ column	Total
1780	67%	24%	7%	2%	100%
1785	53%	30%	9%	8%	100%
1790	64%	22%	10%	4%	100%

Source: (according to availability): *Times/Daily Universal Register*; *M Post*; *L Chronicle*, *M Chronicle*, *P Advertiser*; *Whitehall Eve Post*; *World*; Jul/Aug-Dec 1780, 1785, 1790

These figures show that the amount of column space given to all categories of robbery report could vary during this decade. However in the 1785 sample, a year of peace and considerable public anxiety about violent crime, the very shortest accounts, those of only a few sentences or more, reduced considerably whilst longer articles became much more frequent. The most noticeable increase, in articles of over ½ of one column, is especially high and this is partly due to the large amount of column inches given over to one robbery, that of Mr Mackay. However, as Table 3.2 (below) shows, not only did newspapers dedicate more column space to stories about robberies, they also gave more inches to the more violent crimes in 1785 than in 1780 or 1790.

⁶⁶ *Public Advertiser* 30 December 1790.

Table 3.2**Newspaper space and levels of violence in robbery reports 1780, 1785 and 1790.**

Year	Reports - threat only %	Reports-mild violence %	Reports weapon threatened %	Reports - extreme violence/weapon used %	Reports - murder/attempted murder %	Total %
1780	21%	38%	9%	29%	3%	100%
1785	14%	29%	12%	37%	8%	100%
1790	18%	33%	10%	34%	5%	100%

Source: (according to availability): *Times/Daily Universal Register; M Post; L Chronicle; M Chronicle; P Advertiser, Whitehall Eve Post; World*; Jul/Aug-Dec 1780, 1785, 1790.

Readers must have noticed the increased reporting of violent thefts as well as an apparent escalation in the amount of force being used by assailants. The press undoubtedly played an important – if not major – role in shaping public opinion about the prevalence and nature of crime.⁶⁷ A small number of newspaper reports can lead to many people feeling extremely anxious and fearful about violent crime.⁶⁸ Furthermore small variations in the attitudes of prosecutors and magistrates can have a disproportionate impact on indictment levels thereby justifying increased levels of press reporting of violent crime, thereby creating a vicious and self- fulfilling prophecy. The upsurge in prosecutions which normally accompanied increased newspaper reporting of violent offences is not necessarily independent of each other. It is possible that the latter influenced the former. King has found evidence that suggests that newspapers helped to raise levels of anxiety about crime before demobilisation helping to generate higher levels of prosecutions.⁶⁹ Therefore the upsurge in prosecutions in periods of demobilisation and the increase in newspaper accounts of violent crime are not necessarily independent of each other. Lacking much exciting news to report from the battlefield, crime stories were a convenient fall-back and some robberies that may have previously remained unreported now seemed more attractive to editors.

⁶⁷ King, *Crime, Justice and Discretion*, p 166.

⁶⁸ Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, p 218.

⁶⁹ King, *Crime, Justice and Discretion*, p 166.

Victimisation

To what extent, however, did violent newspaper accounts of robbery reflect the experience of victims when they were robbed? Since we lack any systematic and objective measure to grade the subjective experience of violence, and we also lack information on the 'dark figure' of unreported crimes, it is impossible to address this question in any meaningful way. However, contemporaries tended to distinguish between the levels of force used by mounted robbers and those who were not mounted. There were certain stereotypical conventions which governed how highway robbers and street robbers 'ought' to commit their crimes. Footpads, for example, were invariably regarded as more brutal and violent whereas highwaymen were believed to rob with little real violence (unless their identities were at risk of discovery or they faced opposition by their victims). The author of *The Thief catcher, or Villainy Detected*' (1753) maintained that highwaymen

are looked upon by most people to be the first class of thieves, [they] seldom begin their trade young, as most other robbers do, but take it by sudden flights, misfortunes or disappointments....they seldom abuse, wound or murder the people they rob

whereas

street robbers are the most desperate, blood-thirsty, low-lived villains imaginable, and are generally the offspring of poor careless drunken parents, who neither put them to work, or give them education.⁷⁰

The highwayman, on the other hand, could be violent but Daniel Defoe noted that

the English highwaymen generally rob with more civility and good manners than is practical abroad, and with something of generosity ... [they] seldom need do any more than just show the passengers that they have a pistol.⁷¹

This was a commonly held view over most of the century. Perceived differences in behaviour were not entirely fanciful: since escape from the scene of the crime was of the utmost importance for the security of the attackers, highwaymen – being mounted – had a ready advantage over footpads, who needed to disable their victims to an extent to prevent them from following them after the act had taken place. The difference was also explained in terms of social class: highway robbers, it was thought, were better behaved because they were better bred, perhaps the younger sons of gentry or aristocrats, or even better-off tradesmen who had fallen on hard times through gambling, a libertine lifestyle or

⁷⁰ Robert B Shoemaker, 'The Street Robber and the Gentleman Highwayman; changing representations and perceptions of robbers in London, 1690-1800', *Cultural and Social History*, 3 (2006), 381-405 (386).

⁷¹ Daniel Defoe, *Effectual Scheme for the Immediate Prevention of Street Robbers*, (1731), quoted by Shoemaker, 'The Street Robber and the Gentleman Highwayman', 386

bad luck. Street robbers on the other hand, were perceived as low born, base and vicious thugs.⁷² According to the Duc de Levis, those called highwaymen in Spain, Italy and Germany were usually dissolute characters, perhaps deserters from the armed forces, smugglers and the unemployed. These foreign highwaymen could not be compared to their English equivalent: the only valid comparison was with the English footpad.⁷³ Whereas a highwayman might display gallantry and wit, it was thought that footpads rarely displayed any favourable aspect. This thesis is still held by some.⁷⁴ The mounted robber was believed to steal only from the wealthy and unpopular, and on occasion distributed alms from his loot to the poor. This difference was accepted by many thieves themselves. James Hind, for example, claimed that he had only stolen from the rich and given it to the poor.⁷⁵ Linebaugh provides the example of Thomas Easter, a Norwich butcher, who declared that his robberies were based upon an active desire to redistribute wealth in a downward fashion. When he robbed a gentleman on Putney Heath, upon the protestation that his victim thought his assailant to be an 'honest man', Easter replied in the affirmative "'because I rob the Rich to give to the Poor'".⁷⁶ The extent of the self-deception of some highwaymen is displayed in a supposed *apologia* offered by James Maclaine, allegedly written whilst he was waiting for execution in Newgate, but not published until long after his execution. In his letter to 'Ned Slinker, footpad, pickpocket and housebreaker', published in the *Public Advertiser*, Maclaine, a clergyman's son, claimed there was a gulf between the 'good thief' (the highway robber) and the 'bad thief' (the footpad). He described the extent to which he was a sophisticated man who was invariably generous and polite to his victims, whereas footpads, like his cellmate, Slinker, displayed only base behaviour and one had even been forced by Maclaine to return some of his ill-gotten loot to the victim, a poor labourer. Slinker had a rather different interpretation of events as did the ordinary of Newgate ('though he has been called the gentleman highwayman...yet to a man acquainted with good breeding...there was little in his address or behaviour that could entitle him to that character'. Another dismissed the famed highwaymen as a 'gentleman' in nothing more than the outward appearance'.⁷⁷), Slinker defended his profession in no uncertain terms:

there is no great difference between us, either in point of honour,

⁷² Robert Hopps, *Highway Robbery in London, 1746-1755: the Gentleman Highwayman, Myth or Reality?* (unpublished MA dissertation, The Open University, 2005).

⁷³ Radzinowicz, *English Criminal Law*, I p 706.

⁷⁴ See for example F McLynn, *Crime and Punishment in Eighteenth-century England* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), pp 5-6, 59 ff.

⁷⁵ Faller, *Turned to Account*, p 10.

⁷⁶ Linebaugh, *London Hanged*, p 187.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

courage or genius....I confess I do not see the difference whether a man robs on horseback or on foot, with a pistol or a dash of his pen. If you avoid robbing the poor, I cannot but fancy, if your motives were examined, 'tis not so much for a principle of generosity, as you have not the spirit to venture your neck for sixpence. And as to dexterity, everyone must allow that 'tis much easier to escape on horseback than on foot.

The genteel clothing that indicated Maclaine's superiority was also dismissed by Slinker: dressed in his finery, he alleged, both highwaymen and street robbers would 'swing as handsomely as the best gentlemen of you all'.⁷⁸

Furthermore the dividing line between highway robbers and footpads was frequently blurred since many highwaymen sometimes engaged in street robberies and *vice versa*.⁷⁹

There was, therefore, a clear and distinctive literary mythology surrounding those committing violent thefts in public spaces, and the highwayman was (and remains) a romanticised figure. However, to what extent were these myths, including the differentiation in levels of violence and the suggestions about highwaymen's polite behaviour, created and supported by newspaper accounts?

TABLE 3.3
Levels of violence in unsolved robbery reports 1780, 1785 and 1790.

Robbery category	Threat only	Mild violence	Weapon threatened	Severe violence/ weapon used	Murder/ attempted murder	Total
Highway Robbery	78%	7%	15%	0%	0%	100%
Footpad Robbery	48%	18%	16%	17%	1%	100%

Source: *Times/Daily Universal Register; M Post; L Chronicle; M Chronicle; P Advertiser; Whitehall Eve Post; World*; Jul/Aug-Dec 1780, 1785, 1790; (according to availability).

Table 3.3 provides a statistical comparison of the levels of violence reported in street and highway robberies. Although Sir John Fielding had expressed the view in his charge to the Grand Jury at the Quarter Sessions held at Guildhall, Westminster on April 6 1763) that

House-breakers, highwaymen and other violators of the public peace are not so cruel as formerly...⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Robert B Shoemaker, 'The Street Robber and the Gentleman Highwayman', 399

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 386-7.

⁸⁰ Georges Lamsin (ed), *Charges to the Grand Jury, 1689-1803* (London: Royal Historical Society;

the figures show that newspapers usually reported street robbers as being more violent than mounted men. Although murder or attempted homicide was rare in robberies, highwaymen were never guilty of this offence and footpads were responsible for the few cases that there were. This is, perhaps, a reflection on the fact that weapons were less likely to be used by highwaymen than they were by street offenders. The relatively lenient approach shown by highway robbers towards their victims is clearer in some years than others. In 1780, for example, nearly 76% of mounted robbers used verbal threats only in the act of robbery and a further 10% are recorded as resorting to extreme physical force compared to 51% and 12% of footpads.

Do newspaper reports comment upon the traditional politeness of highwaymen or the crude violence of street robbers? Were highway robbers better bred than footpads? The articles in the papers rarely offered any direct commentary on these topics, and our understanding of readers' likely interpretations of the representations given in news journals is, therefore, to be deduced from the reports rather than directly given as editorial commentary. Victim based reports of unsolved robberies could only speculate about the social classes of highwaymen and footpads. Since the faces of highway robbers were normally hidden by a cloth, neither their faces nor their voices (which would have been muffled by the cloth) would have identified their social origins. Their good breeding was often alluded to, therefore, through the quality of their mounts: since quality horses were expensive, only the well- off robber could afford them. When two 'young men, masked' robbed Rev Williams in his post chaise at Woodford in early September 1790, the papers noted that they 'were exceedingly well mounted'.⁸¹ Occasionally we can establish a link between class and criminal behaviour. Mr Gilbert and his daughter were held up by two highwaymen on Finchley Common in September 1785. Although they lost twenty eight shillings in the encounter, the assailants did not take their watches. However the victims discovered their attackers to be

remarkably polite, and shook hands with Mr Gilbert, telling him they were two retail shopkeepers and were forced to that course of life by the ill effects of Mr Pitt's Shop- tax, after which they wished him good night and rode off.⁸²

Whilst uncommon, there were reports of 'polite' behaviour by some highwaymen. An anonymous gentleman travelling from Reading to London was robbed by two highway

Camden Fourth Series, 43,(1992), p 394.

⁸¹ *Public Advertiser* October 9 1790; *London Chronicle* 9 September 1790; *Whitehall Evening Post* 9 September 1790.

⁸² *Times/Daily Universal Register*, October 9 1785

robbers on Maidenhead Thicket. After demanding his money and searching his post-chaise they took ten and a half guineas and his gold watch. However they 'wished him well on his journey and returned him a guinea to pay his expences to town'.⁸³ When Captain William Baker was robbed of his watch and about £9 in cash by a single highwayman near Wandsworth the robber rode off 'but immediately came back to the chaise and returned the watch'.⁸⁴ However the lack of mortalities at the hands of highway robbers may simply reflect the shortcomings of the sample used. Some mounted robbers were prepared to kill but were restrained by the good sense of their colleagues. When two highwaymen robbed the passengers of a stage coach on Enfield Chase 'of a considerable sum of money but did not offer to take their watches', one of the more hot headed assailants

threatened to shoot the coachman for looking towards them, and it is believed would have fired had not his companion called to him and said, let us not commit murder.⁸⁵

Whilst highway robbers could be violent, newspaper reportage supports the perception of contemporaries that street robbers were usually more aggressive in the act of robbery than highwaymen. When an unnamed gentleman was stopped by two footpads near Sadlers Wells, they

beat him over the head in a shocking manner, robbed him of his watch, two guineas and some silver, and then left him wallowing in his blood, occasioned by the wounds on his head.⁸⁶

At about nine pm on a Sunday night in late November 1785, an unnamed gentleman was attacked by 'three fellows' in Long Lane, Smithfield, who 'forced him into a dark passage' and took from him one shoe and buckle, his hat and walking cane. They proceeded to 'beat him in a barbarous manner'. However, his cries alerted the watchman who came to his assistance. The 'villains', in order to make their safe escape, dragged their victim 'out of the passage and shutting the door, escaped by the other end'. The watchman took the injured man to a chandler's shop and washed the blood 'from his head, face and body' and sent him home in a hackney coach 'being unable to walk'.⁸⁷ On occasion the injuries could be near fatal. Mr Ballard of Hoxton was robbed by three street robbers near the Ivy House in Hoxton 'who cut him with cutlasses in such a dangerous manner that his life is despaired of'.⁸⁸ Sometimes the consequences of such an attack were indeed fatal. The *London Chronicle*

⁸³ *Public Advertiser* 22 November 1785.

⁸⁴ *London Chronicle* 2 November 1780.

⁸⁵ *Times/Daily Universal Register* 5 September 1785.

⁸⁶ *London Chronicle* 4 October 1785

⁸⁷ *Public Advertiser* 29 November 1785; *Whitehall Evening Post* 26 November 1785; *Times/Daily Universal Register* 30 November 1785.

⁸⁸ *London Chronicle* 28 September 1785; *Times/Daily Universal Register* 29 September 1785.

reported the death of John Brown in November 1785 who had been 'attacked by a party of thieves' one night in Old Compton Street. His demise had been caused by bruising when the street robbers

who knocked him down, jumped on him, and very cruelly beat him, then robbed him of a large bundle, his silver buckles out of his shoes, and all the money he had in his pockets.⁸⁹

The footpad robbery of George Evans would have led to great anxiety amongst the citizenry of London. He had been attacked on an early Sunday morning in August 1785 by four men who had been apprehended soon after the crime. However since then Evans had gone missing and 'notwithstanding the most diligent enquiry'

apprehensions are entertained that he has been murdered by some of the accomplices of the four fellows who are now in custody for robbing him; *or may he not have been sent out of the way to prevent his appearing against them.* (Original italics).⁹⁰

However if street robbers, like highwaymen, were able to make a speedy escape from the scene of the crime, they did not necessarily need to use force. When Mr and Mrs Croft were returning to London in November 1785 in their single – horse chaise they were robbed on Blackheath by eight footpads. They stole six guineas, a watch and some silver, but they did not resort to physical force: they cut the horse's girth and the traces of the chaise so that they could not be followed and made off towards Woolwich.⁹¹ Similarly Mr Harris, returning home to Hendon in a one horse chaise was stopped by 'four desperate fellows' in Golder's Green in November 1785. Although he was 'plundered of his watch and money' he 'received no other damage except having the reins cut'.⁹²

The most severe thefts, however, which involved murder or attempted murder - were exclusively attributed to footpads. Of course if the victim was found already murdered it was impossible to say whether the death was due to robbery let alone whether the assailant was a street robber or a highwayman. The press, however, usually attributed the motives for such mortalities to robbery rather than murder *per se*. In the late summer of 1780 a man was found dead in St George's Fields. Because of a wound on his head and his pockets had been rifled, the press speculated that he had been robbed and murdered on his way home from a public house the night before. It was believed that he was a tradesman in

⁸⁹ *London Chronicle* 3 November 1785; *Whitehall Evening Post* 1 November 1785; *Times/Daily Universal Register* 2 November 1785.

⁹⁰ *Whitehall Evening Post* 4 August 1785; *London Chronicle* 6 August 1785.

⁹¹ *London Chronicle* 22 November 1785.

⁹² *Times/Daily Universal Register* 2 November 1785

Westminster who had been drinking that night in a public house in the Borough.⁹³ Only 7% or so of accounts support the claim that highwaymen acted 'politely'. These thefts usually involved women. As table 3.4 shows, mounted robbers tended to steal from women less violently than street robbers did, but this was not automatically the case. For example, three ladies reported that they had been assaulted and robbed about one and a half miles from Paddington 'by two highwaymen who behaved with the greatest brutality'.⁹⁴ However, such reports are not as frequent as those concerning more favourable treatment of females. On a Monday afternoon in early November 1785, the two daughters of Mr Dunkin and their governess were returning to their home in Finchley when they were robbed by a single highwayman at the foot of Highgate Hill. Although he took about £7 in money, when they volunteered their watches and other articles, he refused to take them.⁹⁵ The lack of violence shown towards women may simply reflect the fact that women were unlikely to be armed or put up a spirited defence. As robbers themselves, women could be brutal. Mr Cauldwell was returning to his home in Islington when he was attacked near the Shepherd and Shepherdess public house by three women and three men. A newspaper recorded that they all 'treated him with the greatest barbarity, and left him for dead after robbing him of about eighteen shillings and made off'.⁹⁶ Women, however, were rarely robbers. Deidre Palk's study of gender and theft found that women were more usually pickpockets, most commonly at night in private spaces and often in the act of prostitution, or else they favoured shoplifting.⁹⁷ These offences reflect both the opportunities women had for theft and the difficulties they would have had in expressing extreme force. However if they did choose to rob on the highway women felt the need at times to hide their gender. Sarah Royston was charged (with four others) of assaulting and robbing Peter Green Esq. in the parish of St George of one guinea and two shillings and six pence. The *Whitehall Evening Post* noted that '[t]he prisoner at the time of the robbery was mounted on an ass and dressed in man's apparel'.⁹⁸

⁹³ *London Chronicle* 31 August 1780. The London press also reported provincial robberies on a regular basis. In 1785 the *London Chronicle* reported the discovery of the body of a man aged about forty years of age in a ditch near Newbury, Berkshire. His throat had been cut, 'supposed to be done by some footpads, as his pockets were turned inside out'. *London Chronicle* 20 August 1785.

⁹⁴ *London Chronicle* 7 October 1780.

⁹⁵ *Public Advertiser* 10 November 1785.

⁹⁶ *London Chronicle* 10 September 1780.

⁹⁷ Deidre Palk, 'Private Crime in Public and Private Places: Pickpockets and Shoplifters in London, 1780-1823' in Tim Hitchcock and Heather Shore (eds), *The Streets of London From the Great Fire to the Great Stink* (London, Sydney and Chicago: Rivers Oram Press, 2003), pp 135-150, 233-235.

⁹⁸ *Whitehall Evening Post* 16 August 1785.

Table 3.4

**Violence according to gender in newspaper reports
Jul/Aug-Dec 1780, 1785, 1790**

Highwaymen

Gender of victim	Threat only	Mild violence	Weapon threatened	Extreme violence/ weapon used	Murder/ attempted murder	Total
Male	39%	26%	21%	14%	0%	100%
Female and mixed gender groups	63%	24%	9%	4%	0%	100%

Street Robbers

Gender of victim	Threat only	Mild violence	Weapon threatened	Extreme violence/ weapon used	Murder/ attempted murder	Total
Males only	18%	24%	9%	47%	2%	100%
Female and mixed gender groups	23%	36%	12%	27%	2%	100%

Source: Sample (as previous)

Poverty was no bar to being robbed and treated in a vicious manner. In September 1785 ‘a labouring man, a lodger at the King’s Arms public house upon Holborn-Hill’ was robbed of only a few half-pence by a footpad. The attacker not only ‘knocked him down, and while he lay on the ground beat him with a heavy bludgeon in a most barbarous manner’.⁹⁹ Similarly in Brixton four men stopped ‘a poor man in a small cart going to market’. He was ‘wantonly cut ... on the head with a hanger’ ‘without any previous demand for his money’. A watch and about five shillings were taken.¹⁰⁰ Disappointment at obtaining a small booty could attract a threat of future violence or a good beating. When Mr Sturgess was robbed of his

⁹⁹ *Times/Daily Universal Register* 20 September 1785; *Whitehall Evening Post* 17 September 1785

¹⁰⁰ *Public Advertiser* 24 November 1785

watch and about three shillings between Goswell Street and Islington, his three assailants 'swore they would cut his Throat if he did not carry more Money the next time'.¹⁰¹ A man was robbed on 'the lane that leads to Highgate between Kentish-town and Copenhagen house' of eleven shillings and his watch. His disappointed assailants 'then beat him for having no more cash'.¹⁰² Even youth did not save 'a poor boy' who was accompanying a waggon driver bringing fruit to London. The driver gave the three footpads who had stopped the vehicle in Kent Street a fair prize: a guinea and a half, five shillings and his watch. The boy, however, could only give a shilling. Nevertheless their assailants took the coin 'and gave him a blow on the head, telling him to bring more money when he [was] that way'.¹⁰³

However it was often the mere *threat* of violence, implied or explicit, that was frequently sufficiently frightening to obtain a satisfactory outcome for robbers. When Mr James Hudson of Clerkenwell was 'stopped' by two footpads 'who with horrid imprecations demanded his money' he immediately delivered them 'about 4l and his silver watch'.¹⁰⁴ In the dusk of an evening in late November 1785, Mr and Mrs Maud were attacked in Battersea Fields by three footpads 'who swore that if they did not immediately deliver, they would blow their brains out'. They were able to make off with around £7 in gold and silver as well the husbands watch 'and two rings off Mrs Maud's fingers'.¹⁰⁵ Earlier in the same month Mr Sewell and his wife were stopped by two footpads when they were travelling from Stepney. They were threatened 'with immediate death if they did not deliver'. Mr Sewell was robbed of a guinea and some silver and Mrs Sewell lost about seven shillings and a gold ring. Afterwards their assailants bid 'them go along, but not to make any alarm at the peril of their lives'.¹⁰⁶

However newspapers represented the violence used by assailants, it is difficult to ascertain whether the levels of force in printed accounts of robberies accurately reflect the realities experienced by victims. Newspapers tended to disproportionately report robbery: although robberies accounted for only 6.8% of crimes at the Old Bailey, newspaper accounts of violent theft accounted for 44.2% of all crime reports.¹⁰⁷ They further exaggerated the

¹⁰¹ *Public Advertiser* 7 October 1780.

¹⁰² *Public Advertiser* 26 November 1785.

¹⁰³ *Public Advertiser* 29 November 1785.

¹⁰⁴ *London Chronicle* 27 August 1785.

¹⁰⁵ *London Chronicle* 26 November 1785.

¹⁰⁶ *Public Advertiser* 14 November 1785.

¹⁰⁷ Robert B Shoemaker, 'The Street Robber and the Gentleman Highwayman: Changing Representations and Perceptions of Robbers in London, 1690-1800', *Cultural and Social History* 3 (2006), 381-405 (383).

significance of the felony by accentuating the negative aspect of robbery reports. The crime appeared in print in a distorted form: the matter-of-fact accounts of statements given by witnesses and victims to justices emphasised the extent of force used against them: in Shoemaker's sample of press reports from the early eighteenth-century, one third of the reports included descriptions of violence used or threatened against victims.¹⁰⁸ Such accounts became subtly altered so that the level of violence became the principal focus of newspaper reports of robberies. Whereas earlier printed narratives had stressed the polite or gentlemanly behaviour of the highwayman, or his life story describing how he had come to seek his fortune on the highway, the main focus point of a newspaper report became the violence used in the act of robbing. King has argued somewhat pessimistically therefore that newspaper reports of brutality were 'unreliable, inaccurate and highly selective, favouring the violent and the sensational rather than the typical'.¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless a press account of a robbery had to be credible and contain a large element of accurate and truthful reportage for a newspaper and its writers to remain in business.

Violence was not always the most important fact in a report. Newsworthiness, the attractiveness of a report on a robbery to newspaper editors, was based upon those features of a story that could be used for dramatic effect. A newspaper had to hold the reader's interest and needed to be entertaining as well as informative, and printing large numbers of violent robberies focusing purely on violence may have become tedious and repetitive to readers. It was necessary to leaven accounts, wherever possible, with corroborating detail. These facts could, in turn, become some of the most interesting aspects of the case. Although the amount of force used in an act of theft was part of the drama, stories lacking much overt violence were still given a significant amount of column space if there were sufficient interesting or fascinating details to the crime. These could be classified as stories with a human interest. They may have been accounts with well-known people as victims, unusual circumstances surrounding the crime, the amount stolen (either exceptionally large or small), and humour.

Attempts at self-defence whether successful or not, were almost always important aspects of any report in which they featured. The robbery of Mr Hills, an attorney, and his wife fulfils some of these factors that provide the account with human interest. Although the assailant had a pistol the report does not mention any violence or threat of violence. The couple fully complied with their attacker's demands, Hills complaining only at the

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 384.

¹⁰⁹ Peter King, *Crime, Justice and Discretion*, p 215.

insolence of their attacker. The couple had been enjoying a country ride when they saw a man approaching them, whom they presumed was a beggar. When he came close however he seized hold of their horse and demanded money, which was duly complied with. Hills immediately summoned a pursuit and the robber was apprehended. It would seem that the main purpose in printing this story lay neither in the details of the robbery (which have only minimal interest) or the subsequent arrest of the robber, but the details which arose from his examination by a justice of the peace. The robber's name was Marriott, a sailor, whose family was well known by Hills since he had sailed to the West Indies with another member of his family. In order to highlight this unusual circumstance the writer leaves the threat of violence in the last sentence where Marriott confessed that he was 'very glad Mr Hills made no resistance, for he should certainly have blown his brains out'. This account received coverage amounting to between $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$ a column in three of the newspapers sampled.¹¹⁰

In other accounts also details about the victim were more central to the account than the violence. Mr Maddox was attacked in Shoreditch by three footpads. Although he was able to knock down two of his assailants, Maddox was ultimately overpowered and had two guineas, sixteen shillings and some half-pence stolen from him. The press report concluded grimly that 'he narrowly escaped with his life'. However, as in the above account, the most interesting and memorable fact of the case was neither the violence or the value of what was stolen and was left to the last sentence where it is stated that, 'He is 60 years of age and supposed to be as strong as any man in England'.¹¹¹ The printed report of the robbery of 'that remarkable old man, Sergeant Donald Macleod' is a notable account where the roughness of the encounter and the victim's self - defence is explicit but subordinate to the main purpose of the story, namely to show the resilience of an exceptional victim. Macleod was attacked when returning home by 'three ruffians in sailors' dress' in Park Lane. The subsequent account of the robbery is memorable for its semi-fictive nature, focusing on the thoughts and character of the victim in ways not normally found in supposedly 'objective' news reportage. Thus we read that after the footpads had demanded money

notwithstanding the odds of numbers, Donald determined, if possible, to preserve the little property he had, and therefore made a bold resistance.

The description of his resistance makes for exciting reading. The first assailant 'he fairly knocked down with a short stick which he always carries with him' – a stick he had owned

¹¹⁰ *Whitehall Evening Post* 6 September 1785; *Morning Post* 8 September 1785; *Times/Daily Universal Register* 9 September 1785.

¹¹¹ *London Chronicle* 1 January 1791.

for more than sixty years. Macleod was then stabbed with a knife, but his life was saved by 'an old pocket book full of papers'. Macleod then hit an attacker with his stick, making him drop his stick. The third footpad 'attempted to collar and wre[st] his stick from him' but failed to do so. Victory, however, was given to the street robbers when they attacked him from behind and robbed him of sixteen shillings and some papers, 'the loss of which he regrets more than that of his money'. The victim was then beaten 'in a shocking manner, and [they] would certainly have killed him had not a gentleman on horseback come up at that instant' and the thieves ran off. However the last paragraph concluded positively. The victim, it said, was a 'remarkable old man' who, due to a clerical error was removed from the pension list, made the journey from the Isle of Skye to London, 'a journey of more than 550 miles, which he performed in 15 days'. He was accompanied with his wife and youngest son, 'a boy only nine years of age; the old man carried the boy when tired, on his back'. The most incredible part of the narrative was the concluding sentence informing the reader that the victim was a remarkable 103 years old.¹¹²

Lacking detail about the robbers themselves newspapers, when they were able, offered descriptions of criminals which would satisfy the reader's curiosity and possibly aid identification and prosecution of offenders. The account of Mr William Bilston's robbery near Wolverhampton in December 1790 described the assailants by referring primarily to their height and clothing: 'One of them was a tall lusty man in a blue jacket, the other shorter, in a light coloured jacket'.¹¹³ Some reports included a comment that the attacker's face was covered, usually with a scarf.¹¹⁴ Such descriptions were of very little use, especially when the crime occurred in the hours of darkness, and difficulties of identification often played an important part in the defence of robbers in Old Bailey trials. Descriptive terms were mostly limited to generalities and clichés which were of little concrete use – usually their surprising youth, the quality of their mounts, and details about the clothes they wore. The two highwaymen who robbed Reverend Williams at Woodford, it was noted, 'were young men, masked, and were exceedingly well mounted'.¹¹⁵ Similarly the numerous witnesses and victims involved in the robbery of six coaches on Wimbledon Common by two highwaymen in August 1785 elicited only the vague comment that they were 'supposed [to be] under twenty, one dressed in green, and the other in drab-coloured

¹¹² *London Chronicle* 25 December 1790; *Whitehall Evening Post* 28 December 1790.

¹¹³ *Whitehall Evening Post* 9 December 1790.

¹¹⁴ For example the robbery of four ladies at Woodford Wells by two highwaymen who carried crape masks.

¹¹⁵ *London Chronicle* 9 September 1790; *Public Advertiser* 10 September 1790.

clothes'.¹¹⁶ Some scholars have suggested that newspaper advertisements for the return of stolen property offered an extension of policing, but it is clear that reports probably offered little to aid detection of culprits unless one had a specific suspect in mind.¹¹⁷

Methods of robbery

There were a large variety of methods used by assailants that were classified as highway robbery. Those who robbed on horseback used the most consistent and uniform tactics to rob their victims. Invariably highwaymen acted singly or in groups of two, and occasionally three. Approaching their victim(s) they would demand money and valuable personal items with, or without, threatening the use of violence. Contrary to popular folklore they seem to have rarely used the immortal lines, "Stand or Deliver!" Highway robbers would normally wear a cloth over their face to disguise their appearance and voice. They were always anxious to conceal their true identities, a precaution unusual amongst footpads. When Mr Bennett, the treasurer of Morden College, Blackheath, was robbed on the Heath with his wife by two highwaymen, '[t]he villains insisted on the servant to turn his face a different way while they committed the robbery, threatening to shoot him if he turned his face round again'. This also served to disable the driver from taking any action to defend his employers.¹¹⁸ Highway robberies were always intentional and planned. Certain areas were renowned for their dangers from highwaymen. The roads out of the capital traversing through heathland such as Shooter's Hill, Finchley Common and Hampstead Heath were very risky locations. Josiah Tucker noted that heaths '...answer no other end but to be a Rendezvous for Highwaymen and a commodious scene for them to exercise their Profession'.¹¹⁹ But certain locations in the built-up areas were known to be the resort of highwaymen where they would congregate before and after robberies and plot future crimes. The 'Shepherd and Shepherdess' on City Road was one such location. There was a degree of mutual cooperation between highwaymen when they were forced to share a profitable route: a password would be given to a victim by a mounted robber to ensure a safe passage free from the further attentions of colleagues on the road. Thus highwaymen were able to attack successfully a higher proportion of passengers on the highways and

¹¹⁶ *London Chronicle* 12 August 1785.

¹¹⁷ John Styles, 'Print and Policing: Crime Advertising in Eighteenth-Century Provincial England', in Douglas Hay and Francis Snyder (eds), *Policing and Prosecution in Britain, 1750-1850* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp 55-111.

¹¹⁸ *London Chronicle* 15 September 1785; *Times/Daily Universal Register* 15 September 1785; *Public Advertiser* 14 September 1785.

¹¹⁹ Quoted by Russell Ash, *Discovering Highwaymen* (Princess Risborough: Shire Publications, 1994 expanded edition), p 16.

heaths than they would otherwise have been able to have done. However the system was not always effective. When Captain Gore and his family were robbed at Greenwich Park Wall and he had anticipated the likelihood of such an incident. When they were stopped a second time by eight armed men, Gore explained that he had already been robbed only a short time ago. However he was informed

that was impossible as their friends were on the road who, if he had spoke[n the] truth would have furnished him with the *watch word*; another search therefore was obliged to be submitted to, when the savage miscreants, with pistols at the ladies heads rifled them even of their handkerchiefs...¹²⁰

The techniques of street robbers have received very little attention by historians. Their methods of attack were often very primitive. This could be as simple as forcing a victim into a dark corner, using force to steal their money and valuables. Mr Wilson, for example, was robbed between Knightsbridge and Pimlico

by two soldiers who obliged him to go about 100 yards down the lane, and then demanded his money, and robbed him of two guineas, seven shillings in silver and his watch. They cut the waistband of his breeches that he should not pursue them and ran off towards Pimlico.¹²¹

Other strategies might involve the threat of arms. Late on a Sunday's winter night an anonymous gentleman was 'stopped' by three footpads in Great Queen Street, Lincoln's Inn. One villain

held a knife to his throat, another a bayonet to his breast, and the third a pistol to his head; they robbed him of a gold watch and seals, a 10l Bank note and two guineas, and got clear off.¹²²

However street robbers were not always violent and frequently their assaults simply involved a quick blow, a hurried theft and a disabling action to prevent the victim from pursuing the offender(s). There were a variety of methods used to rob people on the streets of the metropolis by pedestrian robbers. This could, for example involve stopping waggons and chaises, dragging victims indoors before robbing them or robbing the driver of coaches carrying passengers. Although these are too varied to categorise separately, the figures show that the majority (nearly 60%) of pedestrian robberies reported in the press were of a non-conventional type and were not simple hit and run affairs. Historians have

¹²⁰ *Times/Daily Universal Register* 17 November 1785; *London Chronicle* 17 November 1785.

¹²¹ *London Chronicle* 27 October 1785.

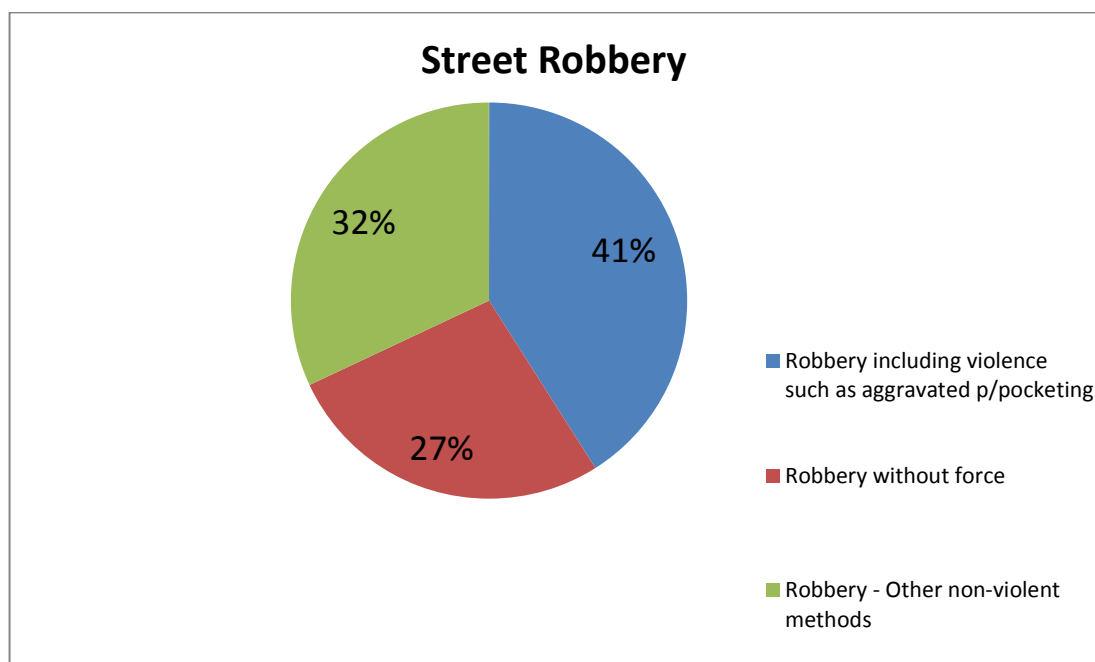
¹²² *Whitehall Evening Post* 24 September 1785.

largely ignored or dismissed the footpad robberies assuming them to be of little interest compared to the more glamorous counterpart, the highwayman.

As we have seen, it has been alleged that footpads needed to use excessive force in order to quickly escape from the scene of the crime, a problem solved by highwaymen through their using horses. But some street robbers were able to dispense with brutality. (See Figure 3.5).

**Methods of Street Robbery in selected newspaper reports:
July/Aug-Dec 1780, 1785, 1790**

Figure 3.5



Source: according to availability: *The Times/Daily Universal Register; Morning Post; London Chronicle; Morning Chronicle; Public Advertiser; Whitehall Evening Post; World*; July/Aug-Dec 1780, 1785 and 1790

Although 41% of footpads chose to use violence, 27% stole without overt force and 32% used other non-violent methods. Mr Upham of Watling Street was confronted by two men 'near the Canonbury-house'. After stealing his money and some personal items they 'cut the saddles, girths, stirrup leathers and rains (sic) [of his horse] to avoid being pursued'.¹²³ Even if force was not used, the experience of being robbed was very unnerving. Mr Goss, a baker in Gray's Inn Lane whose money and watch were stolen from him in the Spa Fields, Islington by three street robbers. Afterwards they 'left him with his Hands tied behind his back ... [until] he was released by two Gentlemen passing'. However '[h]e was so frightened

¹²³ *Times/Daily Universal Register* 19 October 1785.

that he knew not what Sum he had lost'.¹²⁴

Methods varied and could display skill and forethought so that it was impossible for contemporaries to protect themselves through preparation and vigilance. Some forms of robbery were simply a form of aggravated pickpocketing. In 1744 William Shenstone complained to his friend, Reverend William Jago about the dangers of London. He reported that '[t]he pickpockets, formerly content with mere filching, make no scruple to knock people down with bludgeons in Fleet Street and the Strand....In Covent Garden they come in large bodies armed with *couteaus* and attack whole parties'.¹²⁵ A similar situation existed in the 1780s through the means that many contemporaries labelled 'husseling' (hustling), which was especially effective against naïve strangers from out of town. Thus we read that at dusk on a late September evening in 1785 as Mr Hutchinson, a country gentleman, was going down Snowhill 'he was husseled about the end of Turnagain-lane by a gang of thieves who rifled his pockets of five guineas and his watch'. *The Daily Universal Register* added that such 'thieves infest that part from the top of Holborn Hill to St. Sepulchre's church-yard, so that seldom a night passes but some robbery is committed'.¹²⁶ However in November of that year an elderly country gentleman was robbed using a similar, but more sophisticated, technique. Going through Temple-Bar the gent was accosted by 'five or six well-dressed fellows, who shoved him about till one of them took out of his pocket a pocket-book containing bank-notes to the amount of 150l'. The victim shouted that he was being robbed 'but none went to his assistance till the fellows were got clear off'. He had the good sense to return to the bank to get the notes stopped and, on advice, reported a description of his assailants to Sir Sampson Wright.¹²⁷

Young employees were also at risk from becoming victims under such circumstances. The seventeen year old clerk to Mr Clare of Hatton Garden was returning from his master's bankers with a considerable sum of money when he met a young man at the corner of the Mansion House. Afterwards the clerk recollected that the young man may have seen him enter the bank. He received a blow to the face and was fast surrounded by five or six male colleagues. Then

the assailant, seemingly under a pretence of fighting without saying a word, pressed the youth against the wall and took one bank-note out of his pocket, value thirty pounds; and notwithstanding the number of

¹²⁴ *Public Advertiser* 14 October 1780

¹²⁵ Quoted by Christopher Hibbert, *The Roots of Evil. A Social History of Crime and Punishment* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2003), p 50.

¹²⁶ *Times/Daily Universal Register* 20 September 1785

¹²⁷ *London Chronicle* 19 November 1785.

persons passing and repassing the robbers, got clear off with their booty while the gaping spectators, instead of stopping the robbers, were enquiring the cause of the multitude.¹²⁸

The phenomenon of hustling reached a peak in the early nineteenth century, when it was claimed to be a new and original form of theft, but clearly it already existed in the 1780s.¹²⁹

Footpad robberies were sometimes opportunistic but could involve a degree of planning. Since they lacked mobility, street robbers needed information about the likely whereabouts of potential victims. When a poor woman was stopped by two men 'on the Heath' in September 1785, she explained that she had no money. Her assailants then 'asked her several questions respecting the inhabitants of the neighbourhood and then suffered her to proceed on her journey'.¹³⁰ Street robbers could show considerable imagination in their methods of theft. Mr Simpson of York Buildings met a man with a crutch on Constitution Hill in the dusk of a Tuesday evening in September 1785. The 'beggar' asked for charity but Simpson replied that he had no half pence about him. Despite this the drifter followed his victim for twenty yards and overtook him at which point he

turn[ed] about with a pistol in his hand, demanded his money and said that if he made any noise he would shoot him through the head, and robbed him of two guineas, some silver and his watch, and then ran off very swiftly, though before he pretended to be lame.¹³¹

Similarly a porter to the linen drapers Messrs Fowle and Rigby of Ludgate Street was robbed of a parcel of sheets at the lower end of Shug Lane 'by two fellows who forcibly ran against him, and threw him down and before he could recover, made off with the booty'.¹³²

Furthermore the value of the stolen property taken by street robbers could be considerable. As we have seen the elderly country gentleman passing through Temple Bar lost £150. Nearly as much was lost by a pedlar, Isaac Jacob. He was robbed of his 'box and [its] contents, and his pockets of a 10l Bank note and 20 guineas in gold in all amounting to nearly 150l'.¹³³ Street robbers had a certain advantage over highwaymen: for their safety, highway robbers were hindered by needing to remain on their horses during the robbery whereas street robbers were better able to conduct thorough searches. This was

¹²⁸ *Whitehall Evening Post* 13 October 1785; *Morning Post* 14 October 1785.

¹²⁹ See below chapter 4.

¹³⁰ *Times/Daily Universal Register* 10 September 1785.

¹³¹ *Times/Daily Universal Register* 17 September 1785; *London Chronicle* 17 September 1785.

¹³² *Public Advertiser* 10 October 1785; *Whitehall Evening Post* 11 October 1785.

¹³³ *London Chronicle* 1 November 1785.

strengthened by the fact that footpads tended to steal in larger groups than mounted robbers did. Whereas 27% of highwaymen were reported as operating singly and nearly 70% with one other colleague only, 3% or so of reported incidents involved larger groups of men. Footpads, on the other hand, less frequently stole alone or with one other person (16% and 22%) and more commonly stole in gangs of up to eight men. Around 30% worked in groups of four to five. Of course a larger band meant less booty for each individual, but since footpads found it easier to search their victims more thoroughly this may have helped to compensate for this disadvantage.

Burglary and Housebreaking

There were both significant similarities and differences between the felonies of public robbery and burglary/housebreaking as reported in the press at this time. Burglary was legally defined as breaking into a property (dwelling house, shop, warehouse and attached buildings) at night with the intent to commit a felony or actually doing so. (The felony was invariably theft). If the offence was committed during daytime, it was usually defined as housebreaking. Burglary was considered the more serious offence since the residents were likely to be asleep and were 'put in fear' of potential or actual violence.¹³⁴ The seriousness of the crime to contemporaries is shown by the fact that burglary had been one of the first offences to lose benefit of clergy in the sixteenth century.¹³⁵ The law surrounding the felony had become exceptionally complicated by the eighteenth century so that William Eden could claim that, apart from those employed in the legal system, no more than ten men in England understood its complexities.¹³⁶ Burglary and housebreaking were not such high profile felonies as highway robbery. Despite the seriousness and prevalence of the crime there is no literature (contemporary or scholarly) comparable to that for highway robbery. This is despite the fact that victims could potentially lose far more money and valuables in a burglary or housebreaking than in a highway robbery. The latter needed to be fast and the stolen items highly portable whereas a burglar could often take his time stripping the house of valuables and cash, and with the aid of containers and/or a cart take away much of great value, including, on occasion, furniture. In 1788 the Archbishop of Canterbury's palace was stripped of plate worth nearly twelve hundred pounds, and many burglaries involved thefts valued at several hundred pounds.¹³⁷ At the Surrey assizes whilst

¹³⁴ Clive Emsley, Tim Hitchcock and Robert Shoemaker, 'Crime and Justice – Crimes Tried at the Old Bailey', *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbailey.org, version 7.0 accessed 12 September 2016).

¹³⁵ Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, p162.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p162.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p 164.

25% of robberies involved the theft of only a few shillings, only around 14% of burglaries did so.¹³⁸

Furthermore, the privacy and sanctity of the home had been invaded, and if the victims were at home when the burglars struck, there was a serious risk of significant personal violence, especially since a number of offenders went armed. The range of activities that could constitute the offence of burglary were exceptionally wide, ranging from a quick snatch-and-run worth only a few shillings to a deliberate, planned attack involving a large gang of men.¹³⁹

Finally, the growing urban aspirational middle class typical of the capital was especially vulnerable to this type of crime. Commercial expansion led to the class acquiring numerous valuable goods – silver, pewter, timepieces, jewellery as well as items to furnish their homes with and expensive clothes. This made their homes lucrative targets for burglars. They lacked the attendants and servants of the very rich to defend their property, and resorted to keeping loaded firearms and fierce dogs.¹⁴⁰ Unlike robbery, prosecutions for housebreaking and burglary did not decline towards the end of the eighteenth century but in fact tended to increase. Burglary was not affected by changes in the built-up environment in the ways in which highway robbery was. Neither was it much deterred by improvements in policing towards the end of the long eighteenth century. With growing domestic affluence, homes became more attractive targets for burglars, and the crime was increasingly committed by ‘professional’ criminals.¹⁴¹

Methodology

The same approach to highway robbery and street robbery has been adopted for the study of press reports of burglary and breaking and entering, namely physically scanning a sample of newspapers for the months August to December inclusive for the years 1780, 1785 and 1790. The newspapers selected for this section are the same as before: the *Daily Universal Register* (later known as *The Times*), the *London Chronicle*, the *Morning Chronicle*, the *Public Advertiser*, the *Whitehall Evening Post* and the *World*. Special attention has been paid to:

- The length and style of newspaper reportage;

¹³⁸ Ibid., p 164.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p 163.

¹⁴⁰ Gregory J Durston, *Whores and Highwaymen. Crime and Justice in the Eighteenth-Century Metropolis* (Hook: Waterside Press, 2012), pp 54-55.

¹⁴¹ Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, p 167, and see below chapter 4.

- Methods of burglary;
- The use of violence;
- Social class of victim;
- Victimisation;
- The threat from 'insider' assistance.

Consideration will also be given to the notion of newsworthiness as well as the likely impact newspaper reportage may have had upon readers.

Table 3.5

**Burglary and Robbery: Incidents and Reports.
July/Aug-Dec 1780, 1795 and 1790**

Burglary: Incidents	Burglary: Reports	Robbery: Incidents	Robbery: Reports
132	106	419	591

Source: *Times/Daily Universal Register; M Post; L Chronicle; M Chronicle; P Advertiser; Whitehall Evening Post; World*; Jul/Aug 1780; 1785; 1790 (according to availability).

Table 3.6

Burglary and Housebreaking by month: July/Aug-Dec 1780, 1785 and 1790

Month	Burglary: Incidents	%	Housebreaking: Incidents	%
Aug	13	13	3	9
Sept	19	19	7	21
Oct	30	31	13	38
Nov	24	25	9	26
Dec	12	12	2	6
Total	98	100%	34	100%
Grand total of burglary and housebreaking incidents: 132				

Source: *Times/Daily Universal Register; M Post; L Chronicle; P Advertiser; Whitehall Evening Post; World*; Jul/Aug-December 1780; 1785; 1790 (according to availability).

As Table 3.6 shows, reports of breaking and entering properties made up a significant part of the crime reportage of the 1780s newspaper as well as the frequent incidence of the felony. There were 106 newspaper reports of burglary and housebreaking, describing 132 incidents of the crimes. However these offences were not as well reported as highway and street robberies, of which there were 591 reports describing 419 incidents. This suggests that at this point burglary and housebreaking were either not as common or not as newsworthy as highway robbery - a situation that changed in the early nineteenth-century. Between the 1780s and the early nineteenth-century, highway robbery reports had declined from 591 to 146 in the selected newspapers, a reduction of 75%, whereas burglary/housebreaking increased from 106 accounts to 155, an escalation of 46%.¹⁴² Furthermore, the figures for breaking and entering show a seasonal distribution similar to that for robbery, namely a peak in autumn and early winter when the nights were starting to get darker sooner, but it was not too cold to be conspicuous on the streets. Whereas there were only 16 reports of breaking and entering offences in the month of August, there was a noticeable increase in later months peaking in October and November with 43 and 33 incidents respectively. In addition, there was a difference in the reporting of the separate offences of burglary and housebreaking, with only 34 incidents of housebreaking described compared to 98 accounts of the more serious and frightening felony of burglary.

Table 3.7

Old Bailey convictions for burglary and housebreaking, Jul/Aug-Dec, 1780, 1785 and 1790

Date	Guilty verdicts Burglary	Guilty verdicts Housebreaking
Jul/Aug-Dec 1780	6	4
Jul/Aug-Dec 1785	10	10
Jul/Aug-Dec 1790	10	6
TOTAL	26	20

Source: *Times/Daily Universal Register*; *M Post*; *L Chronicle*; *M Chronicle*; *P Advertiser*; *Whitehall Evening Post*; *World*; July/August 1780, 1785, 1790 according to availability).

Do unsubstantiated newspaper reports provide a better guide to the incidence of breaking and entering offences than court records? Table 3.7 shows the number of guilty verdicts at the Old Bailey for the crimes of burglary and housebreaking. Convictions ranged from four

¹⁴² See below Chapter 4.

for housebreaking for the period August to December 1780 to ten in the same period for both felonies and another ten in the 1790 sample period for burglary. For the sample in total, there were a total of twenty six guilty verdicts for burglary and a further twenty for housebreaking. In Surrey Beattie found an average of 9.7 indictments per year between 1780-1802.¹⁴³ However there were considerably more offences reported in the sampled newspapers: there were 98 incidents of burglary and 34 of housebreaking in this period. Beattie believes that few offences committed ever came to court, a phenomenon exaggerated perhaps by the difficulties in catching the most serious (and prolific) offenders and the reluctance to prosecute the more minor crimes as breaking and entering offences with victims preferring to prosecute for larceny instead. Beattie has therefore argued that 'indictments cannot [alone] provide a reliable guide to changes in the behaviour of offenders over this period'.¹⁴⁴ As with highway robbery, convictions or indictments can only provide evidence for breaking and entering offences where arrests have been made, but the large number of unresolved victim reports in the press substantially adds to this figure and further informs our knowledge of these offences.

Table 3.8

Column space given to burglary and housebreaking reports in newspaper reports, Jul/Aug-Dec 1780, 1785 and 1790

Length of article	No of reports	%
A few sentences	33	31
Up to c 10 lines	39	37
Up to c ½ col	30	28
Over ½ col	4	4
TOTAL	106	100%

Source: *Times/Daily Universal Register; M Post; L Chronicle; M Chronicle; P Advertiser; Whitehall Eve Post; World*; Jul/Aug-December 1780; 1785; 1790 (according to availability).

How did the sampled newspapers choose to report incidents of burglary and housebreaking? Of the 106 reports, nearly half were victim reports of unprosecuted crimes. This was likely to have had a similar impact upon readers as the victim reports for robbery did: inculcating a belief that a great deal of crime went unprosecuted, and suggesting that the existing policing and criminal justice systems were inadequate. Furthermore there were only six execution reports – a very low number, suggesting that

¹⁴³ Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, p 162.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p166.

justice was not always being meted out to offenders after a successful prosecution. Readers may nevertheless have been reassured to an extent by the relatively high number of examinations of suspects by justices of the peace, and to a lesser degree, by the smaller number of trials that were described. Furthermore the press chose not to highlight the offences of breaking and entering in the same way as they did for robbery by offering only two comments on the high incidence of these crimes. Reportage tended to be relatively brief with nearly one third of crimes described in only a few lines, and 37% in articles up to one quarter of a column long (Table 3.8). Only four reports (nearly 4%) were descriptions of crimes over one half of a column long. The longer articles emphasised the use of violence in robberies, especially the use of firearms or where items of high value were stolen.

Methods of breaking and entering

Newspapers were often vague about the methods which burglars used to gain access to properties. This may have been due to lack of information or because the details might appear repetitive to readers. However the press would more likely have been anxious to avoid charges of irresponsibility lest the information provided should provide helpful tips, encouraging others to commit similar thefts. Thus when a pawnbroker's was broken into in the winter of 1785 in Kingston upon Thames and robbed of £500 in plate and cash, the newspaper reportage simply notes that the shop was 'broken open'.¹⁴⁵ On other occasions, however, the press was more forthcoming. Newspapers often reported that burglars used traditional methods. When Mr Hopkins' house in the Minories was robbed of £80 in September 1785, it was reported in the press that drawers had been opened by 'picklock keys' which the thieves left behind.¹⁴⁶ Others used ladders as when Mr Prior's home was burgled of linen, cash, a £10 note and goods worth more than £70: '[t]hey got in at the back part of the house by the help of a ladder, to the one pair of stairs window'.¹⁴⁷ Some offenders attempted more ingenious methods to gain access to premises, including the use of false pretences. One Sunday night in Holborn in 1785, a man knocked at the door of a house, claiming that the chimney was on fire and so he had brought an 'engine'. Admitting his mistake, he returned to the door, 'at which stood a small engine, attended by three or four ill-looking men without any crowd'. The paper concluded that '[f]rom the foregoing circumstance, and the silence with which the engine was brought, and the whole transaction conducted, it was certainly used as a pretence for gaining admission, and

¹⁴⁵ *Times/Daily Universal Register* 5 January 1785.

¹⁴⁶ *Times/Daily Universal Register* 5 September 1785.

¹⁴⁷ *Times/Daily Universal Register* 29 September 1785.

perhaps a conveyance for carrying off the expected plunder'.¹⁴⁸ In December 1780 two men called at the Catherine Wheel public house at Blewbury in December 1780, claiming they were lost and in need of refreshment. Once indoors 'they rushed on him, threw him down' and robbed him of nine and a half guineas in gold, five shillings and six pence in silver and five pence. The newspaper noted that '[t]he landlord had locked up the above sum with [the] intent of paying his brewer the next morning, of which it should appear these villains had previous information'.¹⁴⁹ No doubt this caused considerable hardship to the publican. Furthermore, no location was immune from robbers. When St Alban's Church in Wood Street was burgled in September 1790, John Townshend, a Bow Street officer, 'found the lock of the Church door had been taken off from within side, and removed to a cupboard, kept by the beadle, where an iron crow was also found, belonging to the same beadle [and] [.....] appeared to be the instrument with which the burglary was effected'. This, and other suspicious circumstances, pointed to the conclusion 'that some persons, well acquainted with the Church, have committed this act of Sacrilege'. However it appeared that it was not an old offender responsible for the crime because the crime was 'slovenly' done and the easily disposable plate, cloths and velvet had not been taken.¹⁵⁰

Table 3.9 shows the variety of items (reported in the press) that were plundered in the course of breaking and entering offences. By far the most common items stolen were money and plate (72 instances each), jewellery (69 examples) and watches (46). Linen and clothes were also stolen in large numbers (36 and 22 cases respectively). In the press reports furniture was taken 14 times and merchandise from warehouses on a further 21 occasions. The papers reported the more lucrative thefts: in only three instances was money stolen worth less than five shillings described, yet when the value was over £20 or £50 it was reported on 19 and 18 occasions respectively. Watches, jewellery and plate were easily pawned and all these items were highly portable. Clothing too was easily pawned. Burglars may have deliberately stolen such items for these reasons, and are also likely to have targeted the premises of the better off. (However small scale theft may have been prosecuted as larceny). Some thefts were opportunistic. The theft of only two silver table spoons belonging to Peter Blackhall by Michael Smith in 1785 was probably such and an act of desperation, but he was nevertheless sentenced to death.¹⁵¹ The theft of furniture clearly required a considerable degree of planning and forethought since transport was required. When 'some villains' robbed Chiswick Church of its contents in 1785, they had, it

¹⁴⁸ *Times/Daily Universal Register* 31 December 1785.

¹⁴⁹ *Whitehall Evening Post* 9-12 December 1780.

¹⁵⁰ *Public Advertiser* 2 September 1790.

¹⁵¹ *Morning Post* 28 November 1785.

was thought, hired a coach from the George Inn and later transferred the contents to a hackney coach in Dover Street.¹⁵² Some offences took such a degree of organisation that the press believed a gang of professionals was at work. In late October or early November 1785, ‘a set of the gentry called *Rushers*’ called at the home of Messrs Davis and Janeway, jewellers, in Bishopsgate Street. Late at night a visitor discovered that Janeway was out; a little later another summoned Davis to his father’s home because of a ‘fit’, leaving only a young boy and an old woman at home. When another caller requested the boy to meet with Janeway nearby, the boy refused, keeping the door firmly locked. The paper noted that ‘four fellows were observed lounging near the house’ and concluded the ruse was ‘a design to burst into and plunder the house.’¹⁵³

Table 3.9

Items stolen in press reports of burglary and housebreaking in newspaper reports, Jul/Aug-Dec 1780, 1785, and 1790

Item stolen	No of reports
Money: under 5 shillings	3
Money: over 5 shillings	4
Money: over £1	3
Money: over £5	25
Money: over £20	19
Money: over £50	18
Watches	46
Jewellery	69
Plate	72
Linen	36
Clothes	22
Furniture	14
Merchandise from warehouses	21
Miscellaneous	4
TOTAL	106

Source: *Times/Daily Universal Register*; *M Post*; *L Chronicle*; *M Chronicle*; *P Advertiser*; *Whitehall Evening Post*; *World*; Jul/Aug-Dec 1780; 1785; 1790 (according to availability).

¹⁵² *Times/Daily Universal Register* 11 October 1785.

¹⁵³ *Times/Daily Universal Register* 3 November 1785.

Although offences were rarely directly attributed to gangs or professionals, newspapers often implied this was the case. According to the press, 77% of burglaries were committed by groups of two or more men, and culprits were alleged to have used specialist equipment such as false keys. Thus in early October 1785, James Benon, William Vandeput, Daniel East and Francis Storer were identified as responsible for 'having burglariously broke and entered the warehouse and dwelling – house of Lewis Tessier in Broad Street' 'by false keys', where they stole one bale of Piedmont silk, valued at £300.¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, to emphasise the 'professional' nature of some offenders, newspapers reported that, at times, burglars resorted to highway robbery. When, in November 1785, four men tried to burgle a house in Brixton Causeway, they were interrupted and fled the scene. On the Common, 'near the four mile stone which stands by Acre lane, they stopped a poor man in a small cart'. Infuriated by their failure, 'without any previous demand of his money, wantonly cut him on the head with a hanger, and then took from him a watch and about five shillings ...'.¹⁵⁵

Offenders and Victims

Newspapers were seldom interested in the personal details of offenders or the motives leading people to engage in burglarious activities. Furthermore the proliferation of victim reports highlighting unsolved crimes, failed to provide information of value about offenders. Nevertheless since the practice of burglary could require strength and potentially direct contact with victims, it is not surprising that 89% of offenders were identified as male. However women were believed to have committed such felonies. One Sunday evening in October 1785, the apartments of Mrs Shelly near the Middlesex Hospital were robbed 'by means of a picklock' of six silver teaspoons and clothing. The paper concluded that the 'robbery is supposed to have been committed by a woman who was seen to go out of the house'.¹⁵⁶ Thefts by females were often made in their capacity as lodgers or servants. In September 1785 Mrs Hall of Norwich was robbed of three guineas in gold and one guinea's worth of silver by a woman lodger, who had since absconded to London.¹⁵⁷ When 'a woman' was committed at Guildhall for breaking into her landlady's room and stealing 'various articles' it was thought that she had been encouraged to do so 'by the wicked inducement of the mother'.¹⁵⁸ And a young woman in October 1780 'confessed [...] in tears' that she had robbed her master's house in Fenchurch Street of

¹⁵⁴ *Morning Post* 4 October 1785.

¹⁵⁵ *Times/Daily Universal Register* 24 November 1785.

¹⁵⁶ *Times/Daily Universal Register* 25 October 1785.

¹⁵⁷ *Times/Daily Universal Register* 19 September 1785.

¹⁵⁸ *Whitehall Evening Post* 12-14 October 1780.

plate, and was duly committed for trial.¹⁵⁹ Typically female servants acted as accomplices. When Mr Broadbank of Tottenham was robbed of plate and clothes valued at £50 in October 1785, immediate suspicion fell upon a man-servant who had not returned after leave. When he was captured, he confessed but added that the maid-servant assisted him.¹⁶⁰ However servants of both sexes were the most frequently cited occupational group of offenders. These thefts were invariably perceived as betrayals of trust. In September 1785 it was alleged by Mr Clark Page, a barber, that his servant Thomas Allen, had stolen a large silver cup and other plate, as well as a horse. The man-servant was committed for trial.¹⁶¹ Although vagrants were often thought responsible for burglaries in the provinces - the *Chelmsford Chronicle* claimed vagrants to be responsible for 'three-fourths of the burglaries committed in the county', this allegation, is not made by the sampled London papers, despite the problems of vagrancy in the capital.¹⁶² Occasionally lack of information forced the press to speculate about the likely occupation of a suspect mentioned in a victim report. In the autumn of 1785, John Geary was found hiding in a chamber at the Woolpack public house in Digbeth, before he had had the opportunity to steal from the establishment. It was discovered that he had just sold a pair of breeches and a jacket, and the purchaser found in the pockets a knife, candles 'and other odd things, from which it is supposed to have belonged to a mason or some other labourer'.¹⁶³

In Essex, King found that a number of those accused of burglary and housebreaking were teenagers because small stature was an asset.¹⁶⁴ Fielding had previously noted that most housebreakers were 'chiefly young fellows [...] about 18 or 19 years of age'.¹⁶⁵ Although the ages of burglars were rarely given in the sampled London papers, the existence of child accomplices was commented upon. For example, on a Thursday evening in November 1785, 'a boy about nine or ten years old', went to the Baptist's Head public house in St John's Lane, pretending to ask the time, and by doing so allowed an accomplice to cut the lead weights from the tap-room door.¹⁶⁶ Later in the month at The Bell public house in Putney, the maid discovered a chimney sweeper's boy hiding amongst the coal. The boy was secured and 'confessed that four men in the neighbourhood (who have since absconded) had given him sixpence to let them in when the family were asleep, in order to

¹⁵⁹ *Whitehall Evening Post* 24-26 October 1780.

¹⁶⁰ *Times/Daily Universal Register* 27 October 1785; *Morning Post* 27 October 1785.

¹⁶¹ *Times/Daily Universal Register* 10 September 1785.

¹⁶² King, *Crime, Justice and Discretion*, p 159.

¹⁶³ *Times/Daily Universal Register* 15 October 1785

¹⁶⁴ King, *Crime, Justice and Discretion*, p 172.

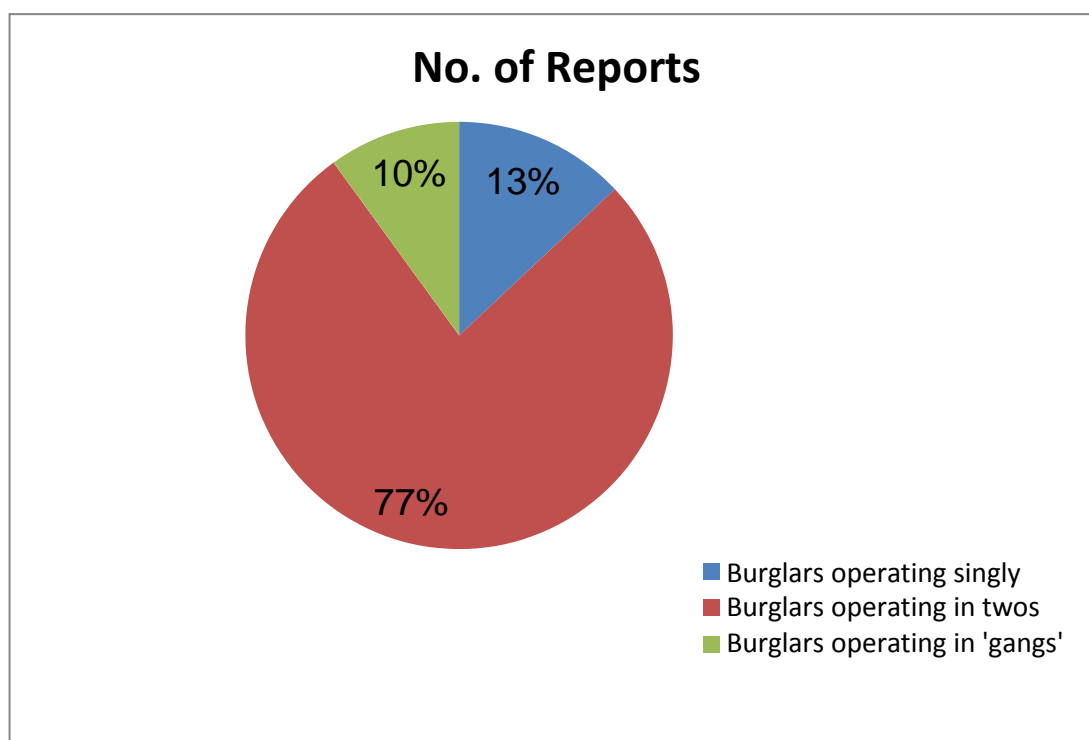
¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p 172.

¹⁶⁶ *Times/Daily Universal Register* 12 November 1785.

rob the house'.¹⁶⁷ Newspapers did not seem particularly shocked or concerned at these revelations but accepted them as a reality of London life, in contrast to the early nineteenth century press which saw this as an emerging problem of juvenile delinquency.¹⁶⁸ Furthermore, although the press showed that 77% of burglars/housebreakers operated in groups of two and 10% in 'gangs' of an often unspecified number (Figure 3.6) suggesting organised criminality, but newspapers did not especially emphasise the role of gangs as they were to do in the early nineteenth century.

**Numbers of burglars/housebreakers in newspaper reports
July/Aug-December 1780, 1785, 1790**

Figure 3.6



Source: according to availability: *The Times/Daily Universal Register; Morning Post; London Chronicle; Morning Chronicle; Public Advertiser; Whitehall Evening Post; World*; July/Aug-Dec 1780, 1785 and 1790.

The focus of press reportage fell more on the plight of victims, their vulnerability and the fear householders may have faced when they discovered intruders in their home. The experience of a burglary, even an unsuccessful one, could be frightening and the audacity of criminals was presented as truly shocking. In the winter of 1785 the home of jeweller Mr Lynes in Lambeth was broken into by three men who believed the house was empty. Lynes

¹⁶⁷ *Times/Daily Universal Register* 24 November 1785

¹⁶⁸ See below, Chapter 4.

opened fire, seriously wounding one of them. The men retreated doing ‘all the mischief’ they could in the front garden, but next day the jeweller received a threatening letter stating that the robbers would have their revenge if the wounded burglar died. Keeping their promise, Lynes was stabbed one night near Vauxhall turnpike. The paper added that ‘[s]carce a family at South Lambeth but what has been robbed lately, as believed by the same gang, one of whom was seen going down the village at noon day with a man-trap he had stolen out of Mr B White’s grounds’.¹⁶⁹ When a gentleman and his wife returned to their home in Robin Hood Court, Cheapside they found three thieves in their home. One escaped by jumping out of a window, but the others were apprehended.¹⁷⁰ Burglars were sometimes armed. In mid-winter 1785, Joseph Leonard and George Wilson *alias* Jackson knocked at the door of Mr John Dickins in Gray’s Inn. When the maid informed them that he was out, they produced pistols and proceeded to rob the property of clothing. Dickins in fact witnessed the robbery through a keyhole and informed the watchman and lamplighter and the culprits were arrested.¹⁷¹

Table 3.10 shows the levels of violence used in burglaries.¹⁷² Although the majority (48 or 45%) passed without incident, there were a disturbing number where weapons were taken as precautions. Many armed themselves – and were prepared to use their weapons. threatened or even used (24 or 23%) and murder was attempted in two cases. Even

Table 3.10

**Use of violence in burglary/housebreaking in newspaper reports,
Jul/Aug-Dec, 1780, 1785 and 1790**

Level of violence	Nos of reports	%
No force reported	48	45
Mild violence	23	22
Threat of weapons	24	23
Serious violence	9	8
Murder/attempted murder (of victim)	2	2
TOTAL	106	100%

Source: *Times/Daily Universal Register*; *M Post*; *L Chronicle*; *M Chronicle*; *P Advertiser*; *Whitehall Evening Post*; *World*; according to availability Jul/Aug-Dec 1780, 1785, 1790.

¹⁶⁹ *Times/Daily Universal Register* 19 November 1785.

¹⁷⁰ *Whitehall Evening Post* 7-10 October 1780.

¹⁷¹ *Times/Daily Universal Register* 15 December 1785

¹⁷² There were no incidents of violence in any of the housebreaking cases in the sample.

relatively mild violence, where, for example, the victim(s) may have been thrown to the floor, was present in 22% of burglary reports. The press reported that many householders When burglars attempted to rob a gentleman's home in Burrow's Buildings, St George's Road, 'one of them was fired at and shot dead', probably by the gentleman himself.¹⁷³ Others kept fierce dogs.¹⁷⁴ Some even invented burglar alarms. Two gentlemen near Hackney had bells in the chamber of the master, connected by wires fed through lead pipes under the road to their neighbour's house. This ingenious method came with the recommendation of a 'worthy magistrate in this metropolis' who believed that whole neighbourhoods could be connected in this way. By this means, 'the rogues might be silently, and as it were by stratagem, surrounded, and almost with certainty taken. What robbers would be hardy enough to attack a house under the apprehension of such a surprise?'¹⁷⁵

The press showed that no one was immune to the burglars. During the 1785 'crime wave', even the stables of the Prince of Wales were broken into and a chest forced open containing the servants' first liveries and other items worth £200 upwards taken.¹⁷⁶ Women were presented as being especially in peril: one third of newspaper reports of breaking and entering offences concern female victims of all social classes. John Craggs was committed to York Castle for stealing a silver cup and clothing from (probably low status) Mary Cotton of Youlthorpe, East Riding.¹⁷⁷ The vulnerability of women was especially emphasised in many newspapers. Two middling class 'industrious women', who were sisters and kept a school in Rose and Crown Court, Moorfields, who were robbed whilst they were at church, were robbed 'of their plate, *all* their wearing apparel, and other valuable articles, the fruits of many years industry'¹⁷⁸ (original emphasis). Although space is given to thefts from lower class victims, special attention was usually given to the losses of the better off. (See Table 3.11).

¹⁷³ *Morning Post* 28 October 1785.

¹⁷⁴ For example at the burglary of the Cross Keys public house: *Times/Daily Universal Register* 10 December 1785 and the attempted burglary of ship-chandler Mr Vincent: *ibid.*, 24 September 1785.

¹⁷⁵ *Times/Daily Universal Register* 4 November 1785.

¹⁷⁶ *Times/Daily Universal Register* 29 December 1785.

¹⁷⁷ *Morning Post* 10 November 1785.

¹⁷⁸ *Times/Daily Universal Register* 29 December 1785.

Table 3.11

Social status of victims in incidents of burglary and housebreaking in newspaper reports, Jul/Aug-Dec 1780, 1785, and 1790

Victim social status	Nos of reports	%
Labourer, unskilled, semi-skilled	3	3
Professional status, 'Mr',	22	21
Shopkeeper	24	22
Merchant, industrialist	22	21
Sir, aristocrat	19	18
Not stated	16	15
Total	106	100%

Source: *Times/Daily Universal Register*; *M Post*; *L Chronicle*; *M Chronicle*; *P Advertiser*; *Whitehall Evening Post*; *World*; according to availability Jul/Aug-Dec 1780; 1785; 1790.

Whereas thefts from the unskilled or semi-skilled were reported in only around 3% of instances, shopkeepers and those designated with the status of 'Mr' or a profession comprised 43% of newspaper accounts. A further 21% of descriptions of breaking and entering offences concerned merchants and industrialists. The higher income groups may have been specially targeted by criminals because the rewards were higher, but the press chose to highlight the plight of the victims of better class status because these were the principal purchasers of the London press, and such crimes would obviously be of greater interest to these consumers. Businesses in particular were mentioned, such as the burglary at the counting house of the brewer Charles Weston, Esq. in St George's of Colgate.¹⁷⁹

Reader reception

Such descriptions of burglaries would have been highly disconcerting to the propertied readers who were the main buyers of newspapers. However the content of newspaper crime reports was not always discouraging, and to some readers may even have been reassuring. More than one third of reportage concerned unsuccessful house robberies where the actions of the householder prevented a theft, the culprits were caught in the act, or there was a recovery of the property. There were also accounts of trials and executions, as well as descriptions of the diligence of servants or the police. Evidence might have been left at the scene of the crime, giving hope that the stolen property might be discovered and the perpetrator brought to justice. When the house of Mr James

¹⁷⁹ *Times/Daily Universal Register* 24 October 1785.

Morrison was robbed of plate, linen, clothing and cash valued at £70 upwards, '[o]ne of them (i.e. burglars) dropped a shoe-buckle, which is a large brass one, such as draymen generally make use of'.¹⁸⁰ The effectiveness of the justice system was shown in one paper's account of verdicts at an Old Bailey session where five burglars were sentenced to death and one respited. (The equivalent figures for highway robbers were five ordered for hanging and five respited).¹⁸¹ Policing could, at times, be reassuringly effective. In late November 1780 one Barrington, charged with involvement in the burglary at Dr Miller's in Epping Forest, was apprehended 'in Monmouth Street while buying a pair of boots, and conveyed to New Prison', from where he had previously escaped. Although he had made a desperate attempt at resistance by firing a pistol, he was secured.¹⁸² Justice was seen to be done in the case of Margaret M'Lochlin who had been found guilty of feloniously assaulting William Coppen in a dwelling house and taking his silver watch. At her execution she was reported as having 'behaved penitently, and seemed quite resigned to [her] unhappy fate'.¹⁸³ Justice may also have been thought fair by some when 'some villains' attempted to rob a gentleman's property near the 'Hare' at Hoxton. The intruders had alarmed the family who fired a blunderbuss at them and shot George Clayton in the shoulder. He was subsequently admitted to New Prison and his wound dressed.¹⁸⁴ And £300 worth of valuable silk stolen from a warehouse was recovered through diligent police efforts in early October 1785.¹⁸⁵

Vulnerability and victimhood

King has argued that newspaper reports of serious crime emphasised the vulnerability of victims and potential victims. Living in the largest city ever known, with a highly transient population seeking employment across many neighbourhoods, it was difficult for eighteenth-century Londoners to know whom to trust. It helped to have a degree of street cunning. A case that excited newspaper readers in November 1785 illustrates the value of a 'hunch' and taking the initiative in the detection of robbers. A single footpad had stopped an unnamed gentleman near Cavendish Square and stolen his gold watch, twelve guineas and great coat. The victim followed his assailant at a distance and he observed the offender enter a watch box and put on a coat identifying him as the night watchman. The injured

¹⁸⁰ *Times/Daily Universal Register* 16 September 1785

¹⁸¹ *Morning Post* 4 November 1785.

¹⁸² *Whitehall Evening Post* 25-28 November 1780.

¹⁸³ *Whitehall Evening Post* 29-30 November 1780.

¹⁸⁴ *Times/Daily Universal Register* 21 December 1785.

¹⁸⁵ *Morning Post* 4 October 1785.

party approached him and surprisingly was not recognised. They fell into conversation and the gentleman claimed that his house had been frequently burgled. He requested if he could examine the watchman's rattle and said

he thought they were good things to give an alarm with and would have some made if he liked it; and the stupid fellow giving him the rattle he shook it so violently that several other watchmen assembling and enquiring what was the matter, the gentlemen informed them that he had just been robbed and that was the robber.

A search of his box produced the coat and watch and money was found in the unfortunate fellow's pockets.¹⁸⁶ The press drew attention to an earlier similar theft and remarked that 'if it becomes common for watchmen to rob the passengers (sic), whom it is their business to guard, it will soon become necessary to have an extra guard appointed – to watch the watchman'.¹⁸⁷

Andrew and McGowen have identified an anxiety prevalent in the unique urban environment that was late eighteenth-century London: the question of whom to trust at a time when recognition by social identifiers such as class, occupation or clothing was fluid.¹⁸⁸ Anxieties were prevalent around shoplifting, theft, forgery and robbery. Appearances could be deceptive, designed to reassure the victim. When Mrs Finley was coming into London on a hackney coach it was stopped by two armed men 'threatening to blow her brains out if she did not deliver'. That day she lost her purse which contained two guineas and some silver, a metal watch and a gold ring. Mrs Finley concluded that 'the coachman knew them [her assailants] for he stopped without their bidding him, and they gave him money as they were going away'.¹⁸⁹ Even more alarming, perhaps, was the experience of being robbed by a business colleague. The press reported the robbery of a 'dairy-man' in Devizes who was robbed by a cheese manufacturer with whom he had done business earlier in the evening and who had paid his victim a considerable sum. However during the robbery he 'recovered, and being a very stout man, soon overpowered and took him', and the cheese dealer was committed to Salisbury gaol to await trial.¹⁹⁰ Meeting fellow travellers on the highway often proved dangerous. When a gentleman was riding into London on a Monday night he was 'accosted by a well-dressed man and told that robbers were on the road,

¹⁸⁶ *Times/Daily Universal Register* 26 November 1785.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ Donna T Andrew and Randall McGowen, *The Perreaus and Mrs Rudd. Forgery and Betrayal in Eighteenth-Century London* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001).

¹⁸⁹ *Times/Daily Universal Register* 7 October 1785.

¹⁹⁰ *Times/Daily Universal Register* 18 October 1785; *Whitehall Evening Post* 18 October 1785

advising him to return or not go alone .. '. The stranger offered to accompany him and they shared the same horse. However after a while 'the pretended friend suddenly knocked the gentleman off from his horse and galloped away with it'. The newspaper recorded that the horse was worth forty guineas.¹⁹¹

The London press chose on occasion to report incidents of robbery and burglary outside the metropolitan area. Their largely London readership was reminded that

the most daring depredations on the Public are not now confined to the Metropolis and its environs – The inhabitants of towns and villages far distant from town have their nightly peace broken and their houses and farms plundered by gangs of thieves, who have dispersed themselves in every part.¹⁹²

Criminals from London operated outside the capital from time to time. Many London-based highwaymen travelled out from the metropolis to south-west Essex, finding Epping Forest convenient for their nefarious activities.¹⁹³ During the 'crime wave' in the autumn and winter of 1785, the London press chose to report incidents of robbery that occurred outside the greater London area, reminding readers that smaller towns and country areas faced similar problems to the capital – which served as a warning to those travelling distances for leisure or on business. Local offenders operating in their own provincial areas may also have drawn inspiration from the reports of London criminals. Furthermore during this prolonged panic the London newspapers increased their reportage of provincial robberies. Whereas during the same period in 1780 and 1790 regional robberies comprised between 10% - 13% of accounts, in 1785 they increased to nearly 18%. In addition these accounts tended to be longer, rising from an average of only a few lines in a column to around one quarter of a column in length. On a Sunday evening at Henwick Hill near Worcester three people were robbed by three armed footpads. Although they stole their money they did not take their watches. Nevertheless the newspaper commented on their 'audacity to offer the persons robbed a passport that they should not be stopped again that night, and fired off their pistols'.¹⁹⁴ The press emphasised that cooperation existed at a number of levels. When Mr Ball of Birmingham was stopped by a footpad in a smock frock near Bacon's End on a Saturday evening, he was knocked off his horse, was badly bruised

¹⁹¹ *London Chronicle* 30 September 1790.

¹⁹² *Public Advertiser* 24 November 1785.

¹⁹³ Peter King, *Crime, Justice, and Discretion in England, 1740-1820* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, reprint 2005), p 141. In 1810 an Essex assize judge believed that many of the cases on the gaol calendar were not due to 'the state of morals in this county but from the vicinity of the county to a vicious metropolis. Many strangers, it is reasonable to suppose ... will be found to perpetrate crimes amongst you', (Ibid).

¹⁹⁴ *Whitehall Evening Post* 22 September 1785.

and lost four pounds. However, immediately afterwards ‘another villain made his appearance after the first had finished rifling his pockets’.¹⁹⁵ Similarly a young woman was stopped near Leytonstone ‘by a fellow with one arm’. The lady refused to give money, no doubt thinking that her assailant’s disability gave her a good chance for escape. However ‘a sharp struggle ensued when another fellow coming up, she was forced to submit and the villains robbed her of twelve shillings’.¹⁹⁶

Targeting victims

Robbers, whether they were mounted or not, were represented in the press as targeting specific social or economic groups. In the autumn of 1785 at the height of public anxiety about crime, newspapers printed at least seventeen descriptions of incidents involving the robbery of waggons coming into London. The press stressed not only the large number of robbers and robberies, but also the level of organisation they employed. Thus two papers complained that ‘[s]carcely a night passes without some waggons being robbed between London and Barnet ... The gang of waggon robbers infesting the above road is said to consist of thirteen desperate fellows, who have several light carts with good horses for carrying off their booty’.¹⁹⁷ The waggons were mostly carrying agricultural produce, often meat, to the London markets and rich pickings were available. Linebaugh found that there were a number of butchers who had resorted to rob on the highway who were familiar with the practices and routes of their victims. He has controversially argued that butchers chose to ‘go upon the accompt’ because their trade was suffering in the transition from a moral economy to modern capitalism.¹⁹⁸ The frequency of the robberies led to many of the proprietors employing guards or no longer travelling at night time. On a Thursday afternoon in October a cart with calves was robbed between Chadwell Street and Ilford by three footpads. The driver lost a few shillings – ‘all the money he had’ – and was threatened that ‘though the waggons and carts did not come in the night as formerly for fear of being stopped, yet they should always find an opportunity to meet with them even in the middle of the day’.¹⁹⁹

Table 3.12 analyses the social status of victims when known according to whether they were robbed by pedestrian or highway robbers.

¹⁹⁵ *Whitehall Evening Post* 24 September 1785; *Times/Daily Universal Register* 28 September 1785.

¹⁹⁶ *Public Advertiser* 5 August 1785.

¹⁹⁷ *Times/Daily Universal Register* 29 October 1785; *Whitehall Evening Post* 29 October 1785.

¹⁹⁸ Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged. Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London and New York: Verso, 2006), chapter 6.

¹⁹⁹ *Times/Daily Universal Register* 15 October 1785; *London Chronicle* 15 October 1785.

Table 3.12

**Social status of victims of highway and street robbery in newspaper reports,
Jul/Aug-Dec 1780, 1785, 1790**

Social Status of Victim by Title or Occupation	Highway Robbery	Street Robbery
Well off because travelling by coach, hackney carriage, etc.	73%	27%
Unskilled labourer, beggar	33.3%	66.7%
Skilled worker, artisan	52.7%	47.3%
Shopkeeper	47.2%	52.8%
Tradesman/farmer	52%	48%
Apprentice	0%	100%
'Mr' or 'Dr used as title; professional	15.3%	84.7%
Gentry; 'Esq' used as title	8%	92%
Aristocrat	33.3%	66.7%

Source: *Times/Daily Universal Register*; *M Post*; *L Chronicle*; *M Chronicle*; *P Advertiser*, *Whitehall Eve Post*; *World*; according to availability Jul/Aug-Dec 1780, 1785, 1790.

The figures clearly show that highwaymen and street robbers tended to have different victims. In part this was due to their different opportunities for theft. Since highway robbers spent a great deal of their time on the open road it is only natural that nearly three quarters of those travelling in vehicles would be subjected to their attention. Shopkeepers, an essentially urban class, were more prone to be robbed by footpads. The most frequently robbed social groups across the board were the skilled artisans, shopkeepers, tradesmen and farmers. Artisans and skilled workmen were stolen from 59 times by highwaymen and 53 times by street robbers for example. When such men were robbed the result could be catastrophic since they could lose the tools of their trade or all of their earnings. *The Daily Universal Register* recorded an instance of a 'poor gardener' who was robbed of £20, 'all the money he had been for some time raising', on Finchley Common in September 1785. At the time he was on his way to settle his debts 'that he had owed for some time and also to purchase some things necessary to carry on his business'.²⁰⁰ However those victims who were entitled to use the titles 'Mr' or 'Dr' were hit upon very hard by violent thieves.

²⁰⁰ *Times/Daily Universal Register* 10 September 1785.

Although there would have been a greater number of the middling class and professionals such as medical doctors in the capital, their numbers were still not great relatively speaking. Nevertheless they were robbed twenty nine times and one hundred and sixty times by highwaymen and footpads respectively.

The greater number of the middling class victims who fell to street robbers again probably reflects the urban nature of this class's lives. Press reports stressed the vulnerability of this class, perhaps the largest demographic group that read newspapers, by emphasising the dangers that were, literally, close to their doorsteps. In November 1785, Mr Peaseley, a jeweller at London Wall 'was stopped *close to his own door* by a fellow who presented a knife to him and demanded his money, but upon his calling the watch, the villain made off'.²⁰¹ Also in November 1785, Mr Harris was returning to his home when he was stopped by four footpads in Golder's Green and was 'plundered of his watch and money'.²⁰² And Mr Milward Esq., the proprietor of the Bromley Mills 'was stopped in his carriage *within an hundred yards of his house at Bromley* by three footpads armed with cutlasses who robbed him of his watch and money, and also took away his shoes and buckles'.²⁰³ Professionals whom the public consulted in their own homes could be especially vulnerable, violating their own living spaces and supposedly safe environment. Late one Friday night Lewisham's surgeon was asked to attend to a man who had broken his leg falling from a horse on Blackheath. When he reached the Heath they were met by two other men who took him to an uninhabited house. With violence the surgeon was forced into the property and relieved of his gold watch, his surgical instruments and some clothes. Afterwards they 'treat[ed] him with the greatest brutality [and] left him bound in the house' until he was freed by some bricklayers the next morning'.²⁰⁴

Newspaper readers' vulnerability was also highlighted by unsolved robbery reports' inability to offer convincing explanations for the motives of criminals other than occasional claims to poverty and distress. Unemployment was a major precursor to poverty and highway robbery. The *Whitehall Evening Post* reported the robbery of two post-chaises at Shepherd's Bush in November 1780. The culprit was pursued and arrested at Hammersmith

²⁰¹ *London Chronicle* 29 November 1785 (my emphasis).

²⁰² *Whitehall Evening Post* 1 November 1785.

²⁰³ *Times/Daily Universal Register* 20 September 1785 (my emphasis).

²⁰⁴ *Public Advertiser* 26 November 1785.

and after his examination the paper commented that the perpetrator, 'a young highwayman', proved to be 'out of place'.²⁰⁵ A causal link between economic distress and a violent robbery was sometimes made explicit in victim testimonies. When Mrs Burn was robbed by 'a young man genteely dressed' in New Tunbridge Wells, he addressed her, a newspaper reported, as follows:

Madam, necessity obl[i]ges me to make this method of obtaining the means of existence; be not alarmed; deliver your money; I shall not hurt you.

Burn was robbed of a guinea, three shillings and a gold ring (which was returned). As he departed the offender wished his victim a safe journey home.²⁰⁶ In similar vein the account of the robbery committed by two highwaymen on Peter Barnes, Esq. on Barns Common described his assailants as 'very polite and said they were in great want'.²⁰⁷ These cases fit loosely to an earlier notion of a polite, well-bred young man falling into debt through lifestyle choices, although this is not spelt out in any detail. However most highwaymen, in descriptions of poverty related thieving, were more threatening. A Mr Myers of Colnbrook was attacked within fifty yards of his own home 'by a single highwayman, who told him his case was desperate, and he must have his money; that he knew he had upwards of fifty guineas in his pocket, and one minute's reflection would send him to futurity'. Needless to say, the victim handed over his purse.²⁰⁸ Perhaps even more frightening for the victims was the thefts from Miss Farrew or Farren and her sister in Hyde Park by 'two men dressed like sailors'. Their attackers 'met them and asked charity'. The young ladies pleaded that they had no half pence, but

Madam, says one of them, we must have silver, and therefore, without delay, deliver your money, make no noise, we will not hurt you, but if you do we will rip [you]

Needless to say the ladies 'delivered what money they had' even though they had seen some people approaching them.²⁰⁹

Causes of crime

However the number of robbery reports that mention economic problems as the cause of theft is very small: only 13 newspaper accounts describing 9 different incidents mention

²⁰⁵ *Whitehall Evening Post* 16 November 1780.

²⁰⁶ *Whitehall Evening Post* 9 September 1790.

²⁰⁷ *Whitehall Evening Post* 4 August 1785.

²⁰⁸ *Morning Chronicle* 3 November 1780; *London Chronicle* 4 November 1780.

²⁰⁹ *London Chronicle* 8 November 1785; *Times/Daily Universal Register* 12 November 1785

the poverty of the assailants as a causal factor. The association between poverty and crime is never simplistic and many are reluctant to condemn the disadvantaged with the broad brush of labelling the very poor as criminal. However, although many eighteenth-century people discriminated between the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving' poor some commentators, like Bernard de Mandeville believed that 'the acquisitive actions of thieves should be seen as enterprise' comparable to the activities of middling class professionals such as lawyers and physicians.²¹⁰ It is difficult to understand how, in a pre-modern economy with restricted and inadequate poor relief systems, a lower class person was able to survive without the occasional illegal acquisitive act. Theft, in this light, is simply a matter 'of getting by' or 'making do': an essential 'part of the broader makeshift economy of the poor'. Whilst accepting that there would have been poor yet fundamentally honest citizens, it is possible to argue with Shore that what might be seen as criminal behaviour by the elite was simply a solution to a problem for the poor, albeit an unsatisfactory one that risked punishment or death.²¹¹ The remaining accounts fail to indicate any other apparent reason for the thefts. Readers therefore would have been left free to imagine for themselves the motivation behind the crimes and in many instances may have concluded that the crimes were random, arbitrary and could be committed by anyone without any apparent rationale. Both King and Snell have reached a similar conclusion in their research on crime reporting in the press, noting that crime as an inexplicable phenomenon can cause considerable anxiety amongst readers.

However the substantial amount of literature on highwaymen available to contemporaries would have provided newspaper readers with reasons for robberies. The motivations of highwaymen were spelt out in the numerous ballads, last-dying speeches on execution days, criminal biographies, ordinaries accounts and pamphlet commentaries. Contemporaries were probably not fooled by the claim that highwaymen stole from the rich to give to the poor, since so few fulfilled this claim²¹²

Furthermore, the claim that highwaymen were political dissidents protesting against either the legitimacy of the Hanoverian regime, thereby abolishing the sanctity of private property, or on the corruption of the Whig government was, by the last decades of the eighteenth century, a dated idea. Although it was tacitly accepted that extreme poverty

²¹⁰ Heather Shore, 'Crime, Criminal Networks and the Survival Strategies of the Poor in Early Eighteenth-Century London', in Steven King and Alannah Tomkins (eds), *The Poor in England, 1700-1850. An Economy of Makeshifts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp 137-165 (p 140).

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p 139.

²¹² Spraggs, *Outlaws and Highwaymen*, p175.

could lead to *some* individuals turning to property crime, eighteenth century commentators developed a new spin on the old notion of the undeserving poor. Henry Fielding for example, in his *Enquiry into the Cause of Robberies* suggested that groups of lower class individuals had developed an inordinate love of 'luxury' beyond their economic station, and were forced to steal to gratify greed. The advancing commercialisation of English society encouraged these ill-conceived desires to dress fashionably, be seen in fashionable locations and enjoy fine food and drink: all moral failings to Fielding and his followers.²¹³ It is true that some highwaymen did aspire to the lifestyle reserved to the elite classes. Some even desired to die in the splendour provided by their ill-gotten gains. However, as Sir Leon Radzinowicz has suggested, for contemporaries

Little, if anything, was known about the origins of crime or about the psychology of groups of offenders such as recidivists, young delinquents and the mentally defective (sic). The unscientific approach to crime and criminals created an attitude of mind propitious to the inception of a doctrine of crude intimidation, self-preservation.²¹⁴

Modern criminological analysis of violent street crime is probably equally applicable to late eighteenth century England. Assault and street robbery, it has been claimed, can originate in rational choice or it can emerge from the subculture of the street itself. Motivations can arise from the desire to experience the thrill and rush of adrenaline arising from the act as well as the status achieved by committing a crime amongst one's own peer group. It might also be seen as revenge or a settling of natural justice. Undoubtedly however the successful enactment of a crime would also provide encouragement to commit another.²¹⁵

Policing the capital

Andrew Harris has described the decade between the end of the American War in 1782 and the outbreak of war with France as a period of 'crisis' for the English criminal justice system.²¹⁶ In 1785 a proposed bill was introduced to create a new police force across the capital. The bill ultimately failed due to the intransigence of the City of London, who were

²¹³ Henry Fielding, *Enquiry into the Cause of Robberies*.

²¹⁴ Radzinowicz, *English Criminal Law*, I p 34.

²¹⁵ Trevor Bennet and Fiona Brookman, 'The Role of Violence in Street Crime: A Qualitative Study of Violent Offenders', *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 53 (6), (2009), 617-633.

²¹⁶ Andrew T Harris, *Policing the City. Crime and Legal Authority in London, 1780-1840* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2004), p 38.

intractable over losing their unique status, but as Harris reminds us had the bill succeeded it 'would have created a centralised and presumably "efficient" police for London nearly half a century before Peel'.²¹⁷ Public and elite anxieties about crime were undoubtedly fuelling many of the changes in policing at this time and the proposals of 1785 were certainly driven by these concerns.²¹⁸ The Solicitor-General was aware of the policing problems associated with policing the metropolis. He argued the need for preventative policing on the model of the newly established Patrole of the City but extending over the whole of London because

If it were to be confined to the heart of the city, it would drive the robbers to the outskirts, and if it were only to be applied in the outskirts, it would bring them all to the centre.²¹⁹

Harris has argued that '[t]he City Patrole made relatively little impact in the press considering the contemporary obsession with policing and crime'.²²⁰

However in the latter half of the century policing was regularly discussed in the press which highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of the existing system of voluntary, amateur parish constables and night watchmen. Newspapers were well aware that policing was inadequate. Most of the unsolved robberies they reported on remained unsolved and it was too easy for offenders to simply walk away from a crime and remain undetected. For example a gentleman and his wife were stopped near Bermondsey turnpike and robbed of all their money. Within a few minutes the offender robbed two other carriages nearby. Despite the fact that '[h]e was closely pursued ... he got clear off'.²²¹ What especially angered the London press was the failure to stop offenders from brazenly flaunting their criminality. The *Public Advertiser* thundered that 'every new robbery is a fresh reproach to the metropolis'. The paper advocated the establishment of 'a stout vigilant patrole'. If they could be relieved of the 'absurd practice' of proclaiming the time 'the thieves', it argued 'could not possibly be so daring as they are at present'.²²² However the press were confused about whether they desired a new police force or simply wanted the existing system to be more effective. At the same time as it was urging the creation of a new patrol, the paper complained that the presence of so many criminals on the streets of the capital in the evening 'openly commit[ing] depredations' was 'almost beyond belief'. It was 'scandalous',

²¹⁷ Harris, *Policing*, p 38.

²¹⁸ Ibid., p 43.

²¹⁹ Ibid., p 49.

²²⁰ Ibid. p.48

²²¹ *London Chronicle* 14 October 1780.

²²² *Public Advertiser* 28 November 1785.

the paper argued, that 'it should be unsafe to walk the most frequented parts of the town after dusk while so many are paid for the protecting the property of inhabitants'. However to claim that the existing police were 'inadequate' was 'a farce': the existing force, the paper argued, simply needed to enforce the existing laws more effectively.²²³ The *Whitehall Evening Post* made a similar point about the increasing number of waggons that were being robbed north of London. It claimed that there was one gang of thirteen 'desperate villains' openly using certain premises and the paper thought it 'surprising that means are not taken for driving the villains from the haunt ...'.²²⁴ The *Public Advertiser* believed many in the 'great commercial city' lived 'in dread of a set of rascals who might be easily disposed were a proper resolution taken for the purpose'. The example of the patrols of St Sepulchre parish was held up to be the ideal role model for the other districts of London: they frequently displayed 'great courage combined with the strictest integrity'. As a result of their vigilance, the newspaper claimed, 'several robbers have been brought to justice and some lately executed'.²²⁵ Other news journals were more favourable to the establishment of a reformed police. The *Morning Post* thought that it was 'an indelible reproach to this Metropolis that some effectual police is not established' given the number of offenders swarming the street, one of whom stooped so low to attempt to steal a pigeon from a poor boy's hand'.²²⁶ Similarly the *London Chronicle* presented case studies that 'sufficiently evince the necessity of some vigorous exertions and the want of a better system of police'.²²⁷ The *Public Advertiser* finally decided that since all proposals for new or reformed policing had failed a military patrol should police the roads within ten miles of the capital.²²⁸

The press were not always so consistently critical of the authorities and their management of the police of London. There are a very different batch of newspaper reports about highwaymen and footpads emanating from the ostensibly anti-Catholic Gordon Riots in the summer of 1780. This was a very distinct kind of panic: it was not generated by the belief that crime was getting out of hand. Instead the authorities lost control of the capital for six days when the rioters looted and set fire to Newgate, releasing its prisoners as well as

²²³ *Public Advertiser* 3 November 1785.

²²⁴ *Whitehall Evening Post* 1 November 1785.

²²⁵ *Public Advertiser* 26 November 1785.

²²⁶ *Morning Post* 27 October 1785.

²²⁷ *London Chronicle* 19 November 1785.

²²⁸ *Public Advertiser* 22 November 1785.

destroying and freeing inmates from other prisons.²²⁹ This was a panic felt most keenly by the ruling, propertied elite. In their anxiety following the Gordon Riots, the authorities focused upon recapturing the highwaymen and footpads who had been released from London's prisons. By emphasising successful arrests and subsequent examinations by magistrates, and presenting favourable accounts of how the authorities dealt with the aftermath of the crisis, the press acted as agents of the propertied upper and middling classes. The newspaper reports were clearly designed to reassure the better off who had suffered such losses at the hands of the mob. This was especially the case when the escapees had returned to robbery. William Edwards, 'who was ordered for Execution for a Highway Robbery and cutting off two of the Gentleman's Fingers whom he robbed but was let out of Newgate by the Mob', and William Ogle were examined by Bow Street magistrate Sampson Wright on suspicion of having committed several footpad robberies since their release. The examination was extensively reported in the London press, receiving far more coverage than a normal examination of footpads would receive. There were at least nine accounts in the sample: one in the *Morning Post*, two in the *Whitehall Evening Post* and three reports in both the *London Chronicle* and *Public Advertiser*.²³⁰ Philip Eyres alias Jones, 'one of the desperate gang who robbed and maimed Dr Miller in Essex' was apprehended, according to the *Morning Post*, at Uxbridge Fair 'where he was bargaining for a very valuable horse, for the purpose, as supposed, of equipping himself for the road', (highway robbery). This was the second member of a gang that had escaped from Newgate to be arrested, and this time the authorities were not going to take any chances since he was taken into London 'in a post-chaise under a very strong guard'.²³¹ The government were so keen to promote their successful capture of London from the rioters that they were, at times, prepared to act rashly. Hayes Gibbs and William Mantlin, two deserters from the Footguards, were arrested in Somerset and charged with robbing Dr Norton in the Five Fields, Chelsea in October, 1780.²³² However, when the case came to trial the *Morning Post* noted that the court had decided that 'the evidence was so very loose and uncertain, that the prisoners were not put upon their defence, and of course acquitted'.²³³

²³⁰ *Morning Post* 17 August 1780; *Whitehall Evening Post* 15 August 1780; *Whitehall Evening Post* 17 August 1780; *London Chronicle* 15 August 1780; *London Chronicle* 16 August 1780; *London Chronicle* 17 August 1780; *Public Advertiser* 15 August 1780; *Public Advertiser* 16 August 1780; *Public Advertiser* 17 August 1780.

²³¹ *Morning Post* 11 October 1780; see also the report of his examination: *London Chronicle* 19 October 1780.

²³² *London Chronicle* 17 October 1780.

²³³ *Morning Post* 21 October 1780

²²⁹ Christopher Hibbert, *King Mob* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2004); see also Shoemaker, *London Mob*, passim.

Clearly there are two kinds of newspaper reports about the activities of highwaymen and street robbers in the 1780s thereby reflecting a degree of variability and flexibility in the London press. On the one hand there are the accounts of the arrests and examinations of suspected or convicted robbers released by the rioters in 1780 which were clearly designed to reassure readers that the authorities were in charge of the situation.²³⁴ But in the general anxiety caused by the mid-decade crime wave, press reports of numerous robberies in the London area that were apparently unsolved only served to unsettle the minds of Londoners. However, both categories of report may provide a distorted impression of the 'real' levels of offending for the felony of violent theft.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the social realities of robbery and burglary in the 1780s, and the usefulness of newspaper reports as a key that may unlock them. The quantitative and qualitative analysis of newspaper reports about robbery and burglary in the 1780s has revealed certain aspects about newspaper representations of these crimes, as well as some of their characteristics, and offers suggestions as to how robbery and burglary may have been experienced at the time. Press accounts reveal the sheer variety of methods used by criminals to obtain money and goods from their victims. This challenges some of the assumptions commonly held by historians about highway robbers and footpads and confirms others. It also contributes to the current debate around the significance of personal experience of crime over press reportage about it, as well as the overall nature of newspaper accounts and the impact they may have had on the reader's perception of the prevalence and serious nature of criminality in the capital.

Press reportage in the 1780s was not static: it was varied. There was a steady increase in the number of robberies and burglaries reported in the papers, but there was a peak of reports in 1784-6. It is debatable whether the increases reflect an increasing number of thefts or an editorial preference to report more thefts, since there is no way of ascertaining the 'real' level of offending. 1785 was a year of considerable public anxiety about criminality, and the sampled newspapers chose to report violent theft not only in greater numbers but also at greater length. The number of short accounts that were only a few sentences long gave way to longer articles that were half a column long or more. This did not happen with burglary reportage, suggesting that, although breaking and entering offences were seen as serious and problematic felonies, they were not perceived as newsworthy or troublesome as highway robbery. Burglary and housebreaking were seen as

normal, everyday risks faced alike by all citizens; highway robbery was placed in a special category of the most heinous yet oddly 'attractive' crimes, perhaps akin to the modern bank robber. Highway robbery attracted considerable interest from readers of all types – from last dying speeches and pamphlets to trial accounts, and it would seem that newspaper editors were aware of this and sought to exploit the public's fascination with highwaymen. However, because of the medium's emphasis upon unverified and unsolved victim testimonies, the newspaper could not describe highwaymen themselves, but only the victim's experience of being robbed. This helped to destroy the image of the 'romantic' highwayman.

Newspaper accounts are a better indicator of the incidence of robbery and burglary than court records. Trial reports or indictments can only indicate thefts that have been detected and prosecuted, but the press, through its use of victim reports, was able to describe many more robberies and burglaries. There were many factors prevalent in the late eighteenth century that suggest that many victims chose alternatives to prosecution, including the option to take no action whatsoever. Newspapers, on the other hand, chose to report mainly unsolved robberies and burglaries, often from the victim's perspective, and many may have originated from victims themselves. This is an important factor when considering the qualitative nature of victim based reports: they are an indicator of the lived experience of being robbed free from the constraints of the legal process in the courts, although still susceptible to the editorial pencil. The extent to which victims interpreted and reported their experiences in the light of what they had previously read of such felonies in the press, is unfortunately impossible to ascertain.

What is also unclear is how readers read and perceived crime reports. Much of the content of the descriptions of felonies would naturally give rise to anxiety, concern and even fear. Newspapers provided very precise locations for these crimes, which may have been the same neighbourhoods in which newspaper consumers lived, worked or had family members. The prevalence of moral panics suggests that there were times when crime reports were accepted as true and believable representations of offending. But there were probably a variety of factors influencing readers' perceptions when they read crime reports which are unavailable to the historian. We cannot be sure about how credible people thought the press in general was, or the importance of personal or family experience. Furthermore the press showed examples of successful self-defence and the importance of effective policing as helpful activities to counter crime.

By the early nineteenth century, the press was becoming more confident and more professional in its approach to crime reporting. Did this change the content or style of newspaper descriptions of crime? Was the press less dependent upon unverified accounts of victim experiences? Were the same sort of crimes described or did newspapers choose to describe offending differently, and with what effect?

CHAPTER FOUR

Narratives of Order, Public Justice and Class: Early Nineteenth Century Newspaper

Reportage of Robbery and Burglary

Introduction

The principal objective of this chapter is to provide a detailed quantitative and qualitative analysis of newspaper reports of robbery and burglary appearing in the London press in the early decades of the nineteenth century. After a brief discussion of the methodology used in this chapter, it will locate press accounts of crime in the changing social, cultural and political circumstances of early nineteenth-century London, especially the revolutionary wars and growing political radicalism at home, as well as developments in policing and the criminal justice system. It will describe the decline of traditional forms of mounted highway robbery and the felony's transformation into hustling as a recognised major form of robbery, and the rise of burglary as a major topic of concern, as evidenced through press accounts of such crimes. The ways in which newspapers contributed to, and helped create, three major preoccupations of the period will be analysed in some detail, namely the construction of notions of 'problems' of juvenile delinquency, criminally inclined servants and a criminal class or 'underworld', all seen as particularly middle class problems. Furthermore, the press was one vital element in helping Londoners (especially middle class Londoners) to understand how to live in dangerous times in a vast and teeming metropolis.

The chapter will suggest that the social and economic transformation of London (and large parts of the nation) at this time radically reshaped the nature of criminality, the experience of victims of street robbery and burglary, as well as perceptions of serious offending, and that this is evident in newspaper reportage. Highway robberies of the traditional mounted type all but disappear because of the built-up nature of the metropolis, and are replaced by the less forceful offence of 'hustling', a form of aggravated pickpocketing. Whereas the former required quiet and lonely places – which were becoming increasingly rare in the capital – the latter thrived on busy streets thronging with people. To this extent, newspapers reflected the reality of offending, since a large proportion of reportage of street theft was taken up with the practice of 'hustling', and highway robberies are no longer reported in the newspaper sample. Some contemporaries believed that serious

crime was declining, whilst others argued the opposite. The perception of the former would have been influenced by fewer serious property theft reports in the press, compared to the 1780s. The latter group's fears would have been fanned by the violent course taken by the revolutionaries in France, together with growing political radicalism and economic and political discontent at home, as reported in the newspapers. Furthermore, newspapers further inflamed public anxiety by sensationalist and exaggerated reporting of serious property crime, in particular its creation of a class of violent juvenile delinquents and a criminal underworld, as well as the threat to domestic security from errant servants. In support of these claims, the publication of national crime figures – which were disseminated through the press – showed that crime was on the increase, and this is supported by increased numbers of trials at the Old Bailey for serious property theft. This may simply reflect an increased propensity to prosecute and the benefits derived from better policing and new ways of reimbursing expenses to prosecutors which reduced cost as a disincentive to prosecute. Improved criminal justice through the police offices created by the Middlesex Justices Act (1792) also probably facilitated easier reporting of cases before magistrates by news writers. This, it will be suggested, probably helps to account for the switch to reports of justices' interrogations (as well as trial descriptions) away from victim testimonies.

The press served several important functions in the early nineteenth century. First, it served a 'public justice' service, informing readers about incidents of crime, the policing of London and the administration of criminal justice. The reading public were able to obtain their own impression, mediated by the press, about how efficient and fair the system was. It will be argued that this could serve to legitimise the authorities responsible for justice. On the whole, newspapers represented the police with approval and did not criticize the operations or decisions of the courts. But the large numbers of crimes appearing in print would have cast an element of doubt about the effectiveness of the police and the deterrence value of punishments meted out by the courts. Second, newspapers helped the government by creating a 'narrative of authority': they showed the need for effective policing, efficient courts and appropriate punishments. Justice was seen to be fair and reasonable, but if there were any perceived weaknesses, press accounts could provide justification for further reforms.

Methodology

Five newspapers were selected for comparative analysis: *The Times*, *Observer*, *Examiner*, *Globe* and *Morning Chronicle*. The *Observer* was sampled because it was a new creation, a Sunday-only journal. The world's oldest Sunday newspaper, it was established in late 1791 by Irishman WS Bourne. In 1814 it was sold to William Clement, a former news vendor, who became an early newspaper magnate as proprietor of *The Morning Chronicle*, *Bell's Life in London* and *The Englishman*. He eventually controlled more than ten per cent of all papers published from London.¹ The *Globe*, founded in 1803 was, until 1921, the capital's oldest evening newspaper.² The *Examiner* was a radical weekly and a supporter of reform.³ The *Times* continued to rise to be the nation's most eminent newspaper. These newspapers were a force to be reckoned with in early nineteenth century London: controlled by respected and powerful men, they had considerable influence. The main foci for analysis are again what the accounts tell us about the nature of robbery and burglary at this time, the offenders and victims as well as the way in which crime reports became a newspaper staple, used to attract readers and engage with them.

Public perceptions of criminality in early nineteenth-century London

Some writers and commentators believed that, by the early nineteenth century, the crime situation in London was improving. A guidebook to the capital published early in the new century claimed that the city was fortunate to enjoy a 'slightness of the restraints of police' because of 'the general good order' prevalent there. Furthermore, it continued, '[w]e venture to assert that no city in proportion to its trade and luxury is more free from danger to those who pass the streets at all hours, or from depredations, open or concealed, on property.'⁴ Gilliman, an American visitor to London stated in 1806 that 'none of our cities are safer than London'.⁵ Those with direct experience of crime held similar convictions. John Townsend was an experienced Bow Street Runner whose career had begun in 1784 and lasted for fifty years.⁶ In 1816 he gave evidence before the Parliamentary Committee on the State of the Police in the Metropolis. When asked whether in his 'long observation'

¹ D Griffiths (ed), *The Encyclopedia of the British Press, 1422-1922* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1922), p 444.

² Ibid., p 265.

³ Ibid., p236.

⁴ MD George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: Academy Chicago, 1984), p 24.

⁵ Ibid., p 24.

⁶ JM Beattie, *The First English Detectives. The Bow Street Runners and the Policing of London, 1750-1840* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p56 and passim.

‘the morals and manners of the lower people in the metropolis are better or worse than formally’, Townsend was ‘decidedly of opinion’ that, compared with the 1780s, ‘when there is one person convicted now [...] I am positively convinced there were five then...’⁷

This may have been due to the success of evangelical reformers who saw it as their duty to promote education and welfare and suppress vice amongst poorer Londoners.⁸ Thus Place could argue that there had been ‘progress [...] in refinement of manners and morals’ so that ‘we are a much better people than we were then, better instructed, more sincere and kind-hearted, less gross and brutal, and have fewer of the concomitant vices of a less civilized state’.⁹ Chadwick and most of the magistrates and other witnesses who gave evidence before the 1816 Committee on the State of the Police in the Metropolis were of the same opinion.¹⁰ As a result, perhaps, the English ‘became one of the most inhibited, polite, orderly [and] tender-minded’ of nations, a reflection of developing bourgeois values.¹¹

But more were fearful of rising crime rates such as Patrick Colquhoun, an early advocate of police reform, whose influential book, *A Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis* painted a dire picture of London low-life. He was writing from personal experience and his testimony would have been read by many influential citizens.¹² Even greater persuasion was offered by the publication of the first official statistics on criminal activity. In 1810 clerks of court or circuit were ordered to make annual returns, backdated to 1805, according to a list of around fifty offences, of the numbers of people in each country of England and Wales committed for trial for indictable offences, convicted, discharged or acquitted. Such figures helped to shape perceptions about the prevalence and nature of crime.¹³ By the 1830s, opinion about the state of crime was consistently negative. John Wade, in his *Treatise on the Police and Crimes of the Metropolis* (1829) echoed the sentiments of Henry Fielding when he compared the metropolis to ‘an immense forest, in the innumerable avenues of which offenders may always find retreat and shelter.’ The anonymity of the capital, he

⁷ *Report from the Committee on the State of the Police of the Metropolis (1816)*.

⁸ J Uglow, *In These Times. Living in Britain through Napoleon’s Wars, 1793-1815* (London: Faber and Faber, 2014), p 259.

⁹ George, *London Life*, p 18.

¹⁰ Sir Leon Radzinowicz, *A History of English Criminal Law and its administration from 1750* 5 vols., (London: Stevens, 1948-1986), 3, p 236.

¹¹ H Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), P 280.

¹² P Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis* (London, 1796; many subsequent editions).

¹³ D Taylor, *Crime, Policing and Punishment in England, 1750-1914* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), p 13.

explained, 'affords so many facilities for the concealment of criminality'.¹⁴ Expert opinion concurred. According to the *Examiner* the Common Sergeant in September 1821 despaired: '[t]he streets of the metropolis are at present in a dreadful state, and no person can walk about after dark without the risk of losing his property. It is a melancholy fact that not content with robbing persons many have had their lives endangered by brutal violence'.¹⁵ By 1832 Thomas Arnold questioned, 'Has the world ever seen a population as dangerous [...] as the manufacturing population of Great Britain crowded together in their most formidable masses?'¹⁶

Tension continued through the subsequent years of warfare with Revolutionary and Napoleonic France: there were fears of home grown Jacobins and the threat of riots caused by high prices, food shortages and war recruitment. There was also considerable agitation for political and economic reform after the wars had ended.¹⁷ The relentless growth of towns and industrialisation also continued to provoke anxiety amongst the propertied.¹⁸ Their fears were not necessarily without foundation. The available figures appear to suggest that the gradual increase in theft that had occurred during the late eighteenth century accelerated during the second decade of the nineteenth and continued to rise thereafter until the 1840s.¹⁹ The increase may be accounted for by the increased population, the development of capitalism and the concomitant growth in personal possessions, or by changes in the criminal justice system we have already mentioned such as the provision of greater expenses to prosecutors.²⁰ This was especially marked in the built-up areas surrounding the capital in Surrey, Sussex and Essex.²¹

Newspaper reporting about crime, justice and public order undoubtedly helped to shape public perceptions as they distributed up to date news to large numbers of people. As Sir Nathaniel Conant, Chief Magistrate at Bow Street, explained in 1816, all serious offences 'where they are of any importance, are universally known through the newspapers'.²² Clearly therefore, contemporary opinion was divided. Were the pessimists correct when

¹⁴ Cited by DA Low, *The Regency Underworld* (Stroud: Sutton, 2005), p xi.

¹⁵ *Examiner* 16/17 September 1821.

¹⁶ Cited by R Sindall, *Street Violence in the Nineteenth Century: Media Panic or Real Danger* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1990), p 3.

¹⁷ C Emsley, *Crime and Society in England, 1750-1900* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 4th edn., 2010), p 37.

¹⁸ Emsley, *Crime and Society*, p 37.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p 33.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p 33.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p 33 citing the research of Beattie and King on those counties

²² Cited by D Cox, *Crime in England, 1688-1815* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), p 150

they argued that crime was increasing? Improvements in policing may account for some of the growth since with better policing and the payment of prosecutor's expenses came better detection and the *impression* that crime was rising. Furthermore, do they represent a 'narrative of authority' supporting the activities of police, magistracy and the law, or does the presentation of crime reports undermine such a message? The next section will address these questions.

Press reportage and narratives of authority

Newspapers represented burglary and robbery as frequent and common offences. Numerous brief notices of crimes appeared in clusters designed to highlight the prevalence and frequency of these felonious thefts. Thus in one edition of the *Morning Chronicle* the paper reported the burglary of the wash house of Mr Bordenave of Brixton Hill was robbed of clothes and linen. The following night Mr France's shop in Great Suffolk Street was broken into as well as a barge lying off Trigg Wharf.²³ Burglaries and robberies were sometimes presented as only the latest in an escalating succession of such offences. When the premises of Mr William Loudan, a watch and clock manufacturer in Great Surrey Street, was robbed of property worth two or three thousand pounds, one newspaper claimed it was '[o]ne of the most daring and extensive burglaries which has been committed for some time'.²⁴ The reporting of trial sentences at the Old Bailey in summary form, and repeating the offence for each person sentenced, would have had cumulatively a strong impact upon the reader about the high number of burglaries and robberies in the metropolis. Describing the latest sentencing session at the Old Bailey, a newspaper noted nine named offenders were sentenced to death for highway robbery and named the felony seven times.²⁵ Residents of a locality were represented as being besieged by 'gangs' of thieves or by specified individuals. When two boys, Charles Buckmaster and Hugh Kelly were interrogated by justices at Marlborough Street Public Office, the newspaper commented that, '[f]or some time back the neighbourhood of Devonshire Place, New Road, Mary-le-bone, has become the scene of daring robberies, the greater part of which have been committed by children. Within the last week no less than six houses have been successively robbed of property to a great amount'. In fact Buckmaster and Kelly had been caught in the act of burgling not only Mr Walcop's home, but also Mr Harris's and an unnamed

²³ *Morning Chronicle* 3 October 1816.

²⁴ *Observer* 29 December 1828.

²⁵ *Morning Chronicle* 9 October 1816

gentleman earlier the same evening.²⁶ In November 1821 the *Examiner* stressed the 'numberless robberies of every description that have lately been perpetrated at the West End of the town by a most formidable gang of robbers'.²⁷

Furthermore newspaper writers claimed to identify with the interests of property owners. In December 1828 the *Observer* 'hoped' that '[a] gang of notorious thieves that had for some time been the terror of the neighbourhood of Mortimer in Berkshire' had been broken up by the arrest of five of their members. At their examination '[f]rom twenty to thirty respectable farmers attended to identify their property that had been stolen, and in many instances succeeded'. There was 'no doubt', the paper asserted, that the prisoners belonged to the 'gang' 'who have infested that part of the country for some months past'.²⁸ Such reportage is likely to have caused anxiety and apprehension about personal safety and the preservation of money and possessions amongst readers.

Early nineteenth century newspapers presented their accounts of crime events in various ways. A principal way was through victim reports: incoming stories of a crime which had taken place recently, often within a day or two of the event, and written from the victim's perspective since nothing was known about the offender, (unless he or she was personally known to the victim, which was rare). Other accounts included descriptions of justice's examinations of suspects and victims, accounts of trials, execution reports and generalised comments about the state of crime or about a particular incident. A breakdown of these different styles of reportage is provided in Figure 4.1 Newspapers represented street robberies and burglaries very differently. First, victim reports were more common for robbery than burglary even though the total numbers of both these types of crimes were very similar (146 street robberies and 155 burglaries). Whereas 33% (48) of street robberies were accounted for by victim reports, only 23% (36) of burglaries were. Reports of examinations of suspects were more or less evenly distributed between the two offences: 54 (37%) were for robberies whilst 56 (36) for burglaries. Trial accounts also reveal a major difference in reportage: only 40 (27%) of street robbery trials were described whilst 62 (40%) of burglaries and housebreakings were. Notices of arrests and executions were few. These differentials suggest that the press adopted a deliberate editorial policy to cover crime incidents in this way. Why might this be so? Because no editorial records for early nineteenth century newspapers have survived, we can only

²⁶ *Morning Chronicle* 22 October 1816.

²⁷ *Examiner* 4-5 November 1821.

²⁸ *Observer* 8 December 1828.

speculate. Street robberies do not lend themselves to lengthy descriptive narratives. They describe crimes that are frequently short, abrupt and involve an act of violence and the theft of small amounts of money and a few personal possessions. Brief narrative accounts are best suited for such incidents. Descriptions would typically contain the date and time of day of the attack, location, the victim's name (if known), what was stolen and the degree of force used and whether the offender escaped.

**Categories of Newspaper Reports for Highway Robbery and Burglary: Aug-Dec
1816, 1821, 1828**

Figure 4.1a

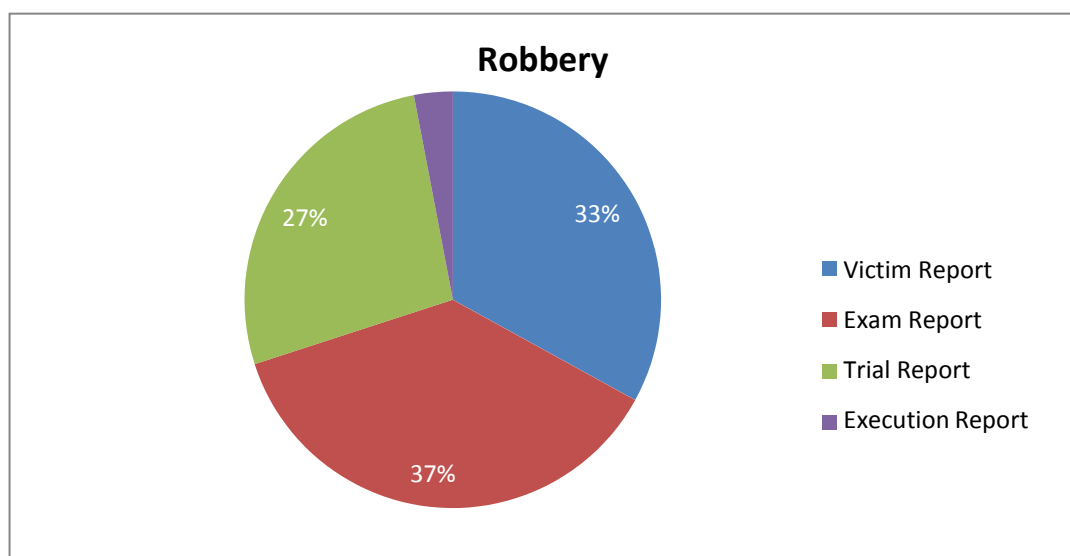
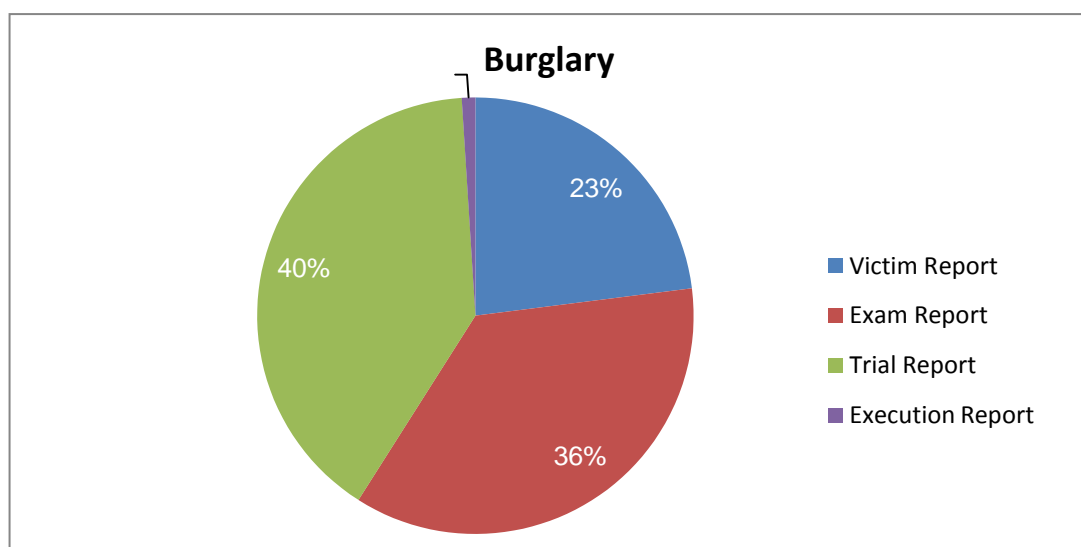


Figure 4.1b



Source: *The Times, Observer, Examiner, Globe, Morning Chronicle*: Aug-Dec 1816, 1821, 1828

Thus two typical victim reports were published together in the *Morning Chronicle* in November 1828:

STREET ROBBERS – On Monday evening, about six o'clock, Mr Charles Martin Oliver was hustled by a gang of thieves in Cheapside, and robbed of a valuable gold repeater. The same day a gentleman, named Kingston, was robbed in Lombard Street of a Russia leather pocket-book, containing a 201 Bank of England note, and several country bank notes, together with a promissory note for 5001.²⁹

Victim reports for burglaries tend to be somewhat longer as there is often more detail to impart. (See Table 4.1) Whilst victims' accounts of street robberies were nearly always under ¼ column in length (84%), victim reports for burglary tended to be much longer.

Table 4.1
Length of Victim Reports in Newspapers, Aug-Dec 1816, 1821 and 1828

Offence	No V Reports	Few Lines	< ¼ col	¼ col	½ col	¾ col	Total	Total %
Robbery	48	21 44%	19 40%	4 10 %	2 3%	2 3%	48	100%
Burglary	38	10 26%	17 44%	4 11 %	4 11%	3 8%	36	100%

Source: *Times; Observer; Examiner; Globe; Morning Chronicle*; Aug-Dec 1816, 1821, 1828.

14% were from one half to over one half column in length compared to only 6% of robbery reports. Only 28% (10) victim descriptions of burglaries were short, i.e. a few sentences, compared to 44% (21) of robbery accounts. Typically they included the same elements as robbery victim reports did: date, time and location of the offence, the name of the victim but the details of what was stolen was much longer and more varied, and the means of entry to the property, including any equipment used, was often described in some detail. The origins of these reports lay with the victims themselves and may have been reported directly to the newspaper, or else were picked up at a police office by a news writer when the victim reported the attack. This could be a source of easy copy for a cash-strapped and under-staffed newspaper. Thus *The Times* recorded an instance when 'a gentleman' reported a burglary at the home of the late Lord Ranelagh to principal magistrate Sir Richard Birnie. He described how the

²⁹ *Morning Chronicle* 12 November 1828.

thieves had cut their way through the parlour windows and removed 'very dexterously [...] upwards of 500l worth of plate looking-glass, of a most costly and valuable description', which had been specially manufactured abroad for the lord. The stolen property, Birnie was told, had been found in the boathouse, carefully packaged and awaiting removal. Although the identity of the informant is not provided, he was probably Ranelagh's heir or the new owner of the house.³⁰ Victim reports can be an important key to understanding the victim's experience, albeit one mediated by the press.

The examination of suspects by justices of the peace was one of the most statistically important categories of crime reportage in the early nineteenth century press. Well over one third of crime accounts fall into this category: 37% (54 instances) for street robberies and 36% (56 cases) for burglaries. Only trial descriptions of burglaries comprise a larger proportion of crime reportage at 40% (62 cases). 27% (40 instances) of street robbery reports were covered by trial descriptions. The switch from victim reports to accounts of examinations and trials probably reflects a further development in the professionalisation of press reporting; there were also more regular magistrates courts established in the new police offices available for news writers to attend. If victim accounts and reports of interrogations were provided by justices to newspapers, the increased number of examinations reported suggests that newspapers were actively seeking out news stories by sending reporters to magistrates and the courts. Taking down details at police offices and courts required advanced literacy and secretarial skills since the ensuing reportage was often detailed and lengthy, sometimes extending to several columns of newsprint. However, we have no way of judging the accuracy of notes or of final accounts of police office hearings.

Examinations by justices and trial reports (usually Old Bailey trials) were similar in content and style, comprising detailed interrogations of suspects with corroborative evidence from victims and witnesses. The examinations invariably show the suspect in a bad light, casting doubts upon their innocence. The language used by writers assumed the guilt of a suspect. When Elizabeth Webb was brought up for examination on a charge of robbing the home of Mr Voller in Shouldham Street, the newspaper stressed her apparent guilt as 'a wholesale dealer in plunder' because she had (allegedly) pawned the victims' belongings and had put the family in debt by borrowing in their name. The newspaper was clear that all of this 'appeared from the evidence adduced' and the testimonies of a number of unnamed

³⁰ *Times* 31 October 1828

pawnbrokers 'and others'. No mention was given of Webb's defence and she was fully committed for trial.³¹

Similarly, assuming his guilt under the sub-title 'CAPTURE OF A BURGLAR', The *Times* reported the examination of Edward Lawler *alias* Ned Kelly for attempting to break into the home of Mr Carpue, 'the eminent surgeon'. "It appeared from the evidence produced', the paper continued, that the marks of forced entry corresponded 'exactly' with the tools found on Lawler. His 'guilt' was further presumed because he was 'recognised in the office as an old *cracksman*, and had often been in custody before'.³² Other attributions of guilt were made by describing suspects as 'villains', 'desperate fellows' or 'of mean appearance' and mentioning other crimes that they *may* have been involved in. The reporting of magistrates' examinations must have been done with their consent, if not their active encouragement. It was not only a cheap and easy way to get interesting copy, but also served to publicise the judicial activities of justices and put them in a good light, furthering their careers.

Given the large number of police officers, there was probably a degree of competition between rival justices. Magistrates were also probably keen to have details about street robberies and burglaries disseminated to a wider public in the hope that further witnesses or evidence might be forthcoming. The public were thus drawn into indirect participation into criminal justice procedures through press reporting. Furthermore it allowed newspaper readers a sight of the criminal justice system in action and in a positive way. It showed that criminals had not only been caught successfully but revealed their apparent guilt. Examinations by justices served to maintain a narrative of authority, upholding and legitimising the criminal law and the criminal justice system. The reportage of trials operated in a similar way since those trials that were reported upon were most likely to have had guilty verdicts with minimal or no mention of any defence proffered. The overall impact upon newspaper readers would have been to encourage trust in the justice system.

The press implicitly supported the criminal justice system in its representation of robberies and burglaries as apparently solved crimes. Although the newspapers used for this study only occasionally followed up a victim report with a description of an arrest of a suspect or the execution of an offender, the magistrate's interrogations were frequently reported in some detail. This gave the impression that a great number of street robberies and burglaries went unpunished which may have disturbed many readers. However they were

³¹ *Times* 25 December 1821.

³² *Times* 28 December 1821.

probably conscious of the limitations of the press, since many trial reports appeared without any apparent preliminary investigation recorded in the newspaper. Readers therefore would have been left unsure about the effectiveness of the criminal justice system.

Furthermore there were within many of the reports of robberies and burglaries mixed messages that at times probably left readers confused about the effectiveness of policing in the capital. Newspapers contained accounts where the competency of the police would have been questioned. When, for example, Nathaniel Delacourt's butcher's shop was broken into and a substantial amount of meat taken, the newspaper reported that '[i]t was stated in the course of the examination that the watchman, who was within a few doors of the shop while the robbery took place, was asleep during the whole of the transaction.'³³ Similar incidents can be found in the news journals of the 1780s, but readers would have been aware of the numerous attempts at improving policing in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and, in the light of such reportage, may have doubted their effectiveness. Nevertheless many news reports showed police officers working diligently and effectively in their detective skills and in their ability to arrest offenders and on occasion police skills were explicitly commented upon. When an 'officer of rank' in the army was violently assaulted and robbed by Peter Flannaghan and James McCowley in November 1816, the officer wrote to the magistrate that 'great credit [is due] to the watchmen for their promptitude in securing the prisoners'.³⁴ And similarly the arrest of the four men who burgled Mrs Ashworth's home in Berner's Street was only achieved 'after many weeks [of] laborious investigation' by the police.³⁵ Such reportage also furthered a limited or restricted narrative of authority: it represented the policing system in a mostly positive way, but showed that further improvements needed to be made to it by the government. The press suggested at times that crime was escalating and out of control, but also that the agencies of law enforcement coped adequately most of the time, but always leaving room for improvement. Newspapers did not advocate revolutionary police reform such as the creation of the Metropolitan Police. Instead they followed the evidence provided in their publications by supporting modest improvements to the existing methods of policing. Radical police reform was perceived as a threat to the sanctity of private property, and by taking this position the press were reflecting the views, preoccupations and anxieties of the propertied classes, great and small.

³³ *Morning Chronicle* 26 December 1828.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 7 November 1816

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 18 November 1816.

Urban Improvement and the Decline of Highway Robbery

Moving on from the general survey of press and fear of crime above, this section will consider specific types of offences, seeking always to disentangle where possible real trends in crime and developments in the nature of press reporting. One startling difference from the earlier survey is the almost complete disappearance of highway robbery. In the sample, there are no instances of traditional highway robberies: the felony was becoming archaic, replaced by more common forms of street robbery. Contemporaries seem to have agreed that mounted highway robbery was in rapid decline by the early nineteenth century. A parliamentary commission in 1839 failed to find any examples of horse-led highway robbery or indeed any 'recent cases of the robbery of mails, or of travellers in stage coaches by robbers of that description'; the last recorded occurred near Taunton in 1831.³⁶ Chadwick wrote that 'the roads in the greater number of instances are more safe than formerly; the race of highwaymen is extinct [sic], and a gentleman would now find it an exceedingly bad speculation to "take to the road" after the old fashion, in the expectation of being there able to repair his ruined fortunes'.³⁷ Francis Place tacitly acknowledged the extinction of highway robbery in his memories of watching the highwaymen mounting their steeds at the 'Dog and Duck' of a summer evening.³⁸ The last highwayman in the London area was Jerry Abershaw, executed in 1795 after shooting a police officer.³⁹ All notions of the gentlemanly highwaymen were well and truly gone. Destroyed, Shoemaker argues, by the prevalence of newspapers regularly printing stories about highway robberies, which successfully abolished any credible claims to genteel behaviour by highwaymen.⁴⁰

Improvements in policing the capital, discussed above, encouraged the rapid decline in highway robbery. White has argued that highway robbery in London ended around 1805 when the Bow Street Horse Patrol was introduced.⁴¹ The parliamentary commission on the introduction of county police forces (1839) believed that the introduction of armed mounted police patrols had successfully eliminated highwaymen from the roads, together with the new turnpikes 'and other means of recognition and detection'.⁴² That every district of the capital enjoyed a police office run by professional magistrates, each with a

³⁶ J Sharpe, *Dick Turpin. The Myth of the English Highwaymen* (London: Profile Books, 2004), p 159.

³⁷ Chadwick, *Review*, pp 261-2.

³⁸ Place, *Autobiography*, p 18 n2.

³⁹ G Spraggs, *Outlaws and Highwaymen. The Cult of the Robber in England from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century* (London: Pimlico, 20010, p 234.

⁴⁰ R Shoemaker, 'The Street Robber and the Gentleman Highwayman: Changing Representations and Perceptions of Robbery in London, 1690-1800', *Cultural and Social History* 3 (2006), 381-405.

⁴¹ White, *London in Nineteenth Century*, p 337.

⁴² Sharpe, *Dick Turpin*, p 159.

paid police force, under the terms of the 1792 Middlesex Justices Act, was probably equally important.

Better detection lead to more effective deterrence, but there were also fewer *opportunities* to rob in this most traditional manner in the developing capital. London was being transformed from an early modern city (albeit of very large size), into a recognisably very modern metropolis. A newspaper in 1810 reminded its readers about the rapidity of development when it noted that between Blackfriars Bridge and the Elephant and Castle there had been only fifty dwellings a generation ago, commenting that 'it is not forty years since highway robberies were frequent in St George's Fields'.⁴³

The period also witnessed the beginning of commuting by the bourgeoisie, making once quiet roads much busier, giving highway robbers fewer opportunities to practise their craft. The hamlets, villages and small country towns to the north, west and south of the metropolis grew rapidly by those wish to escape the overcrowded city. People were willing to travel substantial distances: in 1808 a stockbroker had committed suicide whose home was located fourteen miles away from his business in Cornhill.⁴⁴ Before nine in the morning, clerks walked to work; between nine and eleven, the shopkeepers, lawyers and stockbrokers travelled in, followed by gentlemen in the afternoon.⁴⁵ Given that return journeys were also needed, this ensured that the roads into the capital were always busy. Nevertheless it was thought in the 1820s that the reason crime, especially burglary, had grown in the City to such an extent, was because citizens no longer spent their nights there.⁴⁶ Furthermore the development of turnpikes along the principal highways into the capital made it very difficult for highwaymen to operate unnoticed. Although some turnpike keepers may have been susceptible to bribery, this reduced a robber's takings without necessarily guaranteeing his personal safety.⁴⁷

Urban Change and the Transformation to Hustling

Busier thoroughfares, improved lighting and paving and urban sprawl led to the emergence of a newer form of street robbery better suited to these conditions, labelled 'hustling' by newspapers and contemporaries. 'Hustling' was typically a crime of young males carried out in daytime on busy streets, often in places where the public had gathered or in

⁴³ Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, pp 160-1.

⁴⁴ White, *London in the Nineteenth Century*, p 70.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p70.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p70.

⁴⁷ JJ Tobias, *Crime and Industrial Society in the Nineteenth Century* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), pp 221, 230, 268.

community spaces. Victims often described their experience as being pressurised, harassed or pushed about by large groups or gangs who used their physical mass to intimidate and confuse.⁴⁸ Although the crime had existed since the late 1780s, the offence only came to be seen as a major social problem in the early nineteenth century. Whether this reflects an increase in pickpocketing is debatable: it may simply reflect the fact that it was now easier to prosecute on a non-capital charge, avoiding a victim's reluctance to invoke the death penalty. In 1813 a correspondent to the *Morning Post* complained that 'the streets of the City are most shamefully infested day and night by organised gangs of *pickpockets*, *hustlers*, and *street robbers*, and that the losses sustained by the public in consequence have been very considerable'.⁴⁹ In 1820 *The Times* believed that 'crime increases to such a pitch that, in passing through Fleet Street and the Strand in the middle of the day, people are hustled and robbed with impunity'.⁵⁰ There was official anxiety too. Both of the Select Committees of 1816 and 1817 had expressed their worries about the incidence of street robberies, especially 'those fellows who hustle passengers in the street'.⁵¹ These comments show that both press and MPs tended to conflate hustling with more traditional forms of street robbery, the former being simply a new variant of the latter.

However hustlers were rarely as violent as footpads or highwaymen. John Townsend, an experienced Bow Street Runner, provided evidence to the 1816 Committee on the State of the Police. Somewhat optimistically he stated that 'there are no footpad robberies or road robberies now, but merely jostling you in the streets. They used to be ready to pop at a man as soon as he let down his glass that was by the banditti... [but] people travel more safely now'. John Vickery, another Runner agreed with him. Even the Recorder, John Silvester, an experienced former counsel at the Old Bailey and Common Sergeant, confirmed that 'we now have no cruel offenders, no extraordinary violence against the person, was we had formerly'.⁵²

Hustling thefts gave assailants ample opportunity for stealing without the need to disable the victim. This is reflected in press reporting. In November 1816 a Bedfordshire farmer named Luten was hustled by a gang of eight men. The force used, however, was minimal:

⁴⁸ H Shore, *London's Criminal Underworlds, c1720-c1930. A Social and Cultural History* (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p 73.

⁴⁹ Shore, *Underworlds*, p 75.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p 77.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p 75.

⁵² *Committee on the Police of the Metropolis* (1816), 144, 177, 212-13, 223.

Luten only stated that his assailants had had the 'audacity' to lift his arms to prevent self-defence.⁵³ If any violence was used by assailants, it might be in response to the victim's attempts to defend themselves. In the winter of 1821 an Italian, Senior Provisini, claimed that as he was passing through the Piazza at Covent Garden, he was 'hustled' by five young men. When one put his hand into the victim's pocket, Provisini responded by striking him. Provisini seized one of the men, Hargrave, who bit the victim's hand and punched his nose.⁵⁴ The line between hustling (which was usually treated as a pickpocketing offence) and highway robbery was often a subtle one. The following case illustrates the difference in law between stealing from the person and highway robbery.

At the trial of Isaac Davis and Moss Jacobs for highway robbery in 1815, it was claimed that the two defendants had robbed Margaret Quinland of money and two shawls. The court considered the degree of force used. If the shawl had been simply snatched the offence was larceny but if Quinland had resisted and held on to the shawls and the defendants had nevertheless succeeded in getting them, the newspaper reported, 'that would be force and violence enough to constitute a highway robbery'.⁵⁵ A similar 'audacious' robbery was committed by a boy with a group of older men. As a lady 'of the name of Hume of Pentonville' walked down the street, the boy, aided by the men, snatched a swansdown tippet and a valuable shawl from her back.⁵⁶ An act of 1808 had specified that if the degree of violence used was not excessive, and if weapons were not employed in the robbery, then the offence was one of pickpocketing and not highway robbery.⁵⁷ However in these cases at least, police officers appear to have been attempting to 'stretch' the meaning of the act to convict more offenders on a capital charge. Press reporting not only helped to educate the public about the finer points of criminal law, but also helped support a narrative of authority by showing that the law was carefully and justly executed by justices and the courts.

These crimes were very different in character from the traditional highway robberies, which usually took place at night in deserted spaces such as heaths and commons. They also differed from footpad robberies in the level of force and violence they employed; they were never a serious risk to life, only a threat to personal possessions and money. As Shore

⁵³ *Morning Chronicle* 16 November 1816

⁵⁴ *Times* 4 December 1821.

⁵⁵ Shore, *Underworlds*, p 83.

⁵⁶ *Morning Chronicle* 16 November 1816.

⁵⁷ Shore, *Underworlds*, pp 72-3.

has argued, 'For the press hustling had become an epithet for street robbery, reflecting a new sort of public danger [...] Old fears were repackaged using the new language of hustling'. It was thought that the largely anonymous interaction of so many bodies on the public stage provided the perfect opportunity for 'gangs' to surround and 'hustle' vulnerable or unwary Londoners.⁵⁸ The press highlighted hustling over other forms of street robbery: in the sample used for this thesis, whereas hustling cases comprised 12% of all street robberies, they occupied 22% of the column space given to robbery reporting in the sample surveyed for this thesis. Daytime busy-ness, crowdedness and urbanisation were able to provide the same sort of cover for hustlers that had previously been provided by isolated spaces and the darkness of night for highwaymen. Thus the message given to newspaper readers was one of vulnerability, and the necessity of being constantly aware of, but not interacting with, strangers in public places.

The streets where hustling took place were 'contested spaces'. Certain districts of London were stigmatised as poor, dirty, unrespectable and criminal; others witnessed tensions between disorderly residents and their more respectable neighbours. Tensions could become aggressive, bringing further problems with law enforcement agents.⁵⁹ The role of the press was a central factor in this process of 'labelling' and stigmatising certain parts of the metropolis, as well as their residents, as 'criminal' to bourgeois readers. Furthermore such press categorisation was self-fulfilling, creating districts that were, in a sense, genuinely 'criminal'. However newspapers rarely gave any indication of the home address or even district where an offender lived – only the location of the crime. Thus certain districts became known as areas of high risk and danger, but these were not necessarily always the 'lowest' areas of the capital.

In addition, newspapers represented this as a London phenomenon: 87% of crime reports in the sample concerned the greater London area and only 13% concerned provincial crimes. What happened in London was of crucial importance: it was the model of experience that was broadcast to the elite, the middle classes, law makers and government as well as the rest of the nation, and this was achieved through the medium of print.⁶⁰ It was largely a middle class experience that was transmitted. The press mostly recorded theft on the middle class, which perhaps, is not surprising. The upper classes were small in number relative to other classes and had their own servants, who were often armed, for

⁵⁸ Shore, *Underworlds*, p 76.

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp 17-18.

⁶⁰ R Sindall, *Street Violence*, pp 4-5.

protection. Middle class men and women had few such advantages. The obviously poorer classes were less tempting targets for thieves as they were not likely to have valuable items or much money. It may be significant that one of the more frequent occupations given of lower class victims is that of soldier or sailor: an easily recognisable group of men who robbers may have thought had been recently discharged from active service and therefore have a lot of back pay about them.

Furthermore newspaper proprietors knew that their financial success lay with the middle class consumer as they were the principal purchasers of newspapers, as evidenced by the nature of much advertising in the press, which was targeted at a middle class audience. They may have reported middle class victims disproportionately because they knew it would appeal to a significant demographic sector of their readership. Thus readers came to perceive that property theft was primarily committed by the *lower class* against the *middle class*. As Sindall has argued, what was important about the outbreak of street robberies in the nineteenth century was less the actual events, but the newspaper reports, criminal statistics and court records which the middle classes believed accurately reflected these events. He further states that 'crime as a cause of a result of social change was not a lower socio-economic group act but a middle class perception of that act. Therefore, the interest lies not with the motivation of the lower-class act but with the formation of middle class perceptions'.⁶¹ Not only was crime perceived as class based through the medium of newsprint, the press also gave a distorted picture of the frequency and severity of crime amongst that class, ultimately leading to the creation of notions of a criminal 'class' and 'underworld' and demands for more effective public order.

Press reportage suggests that the police attempted to broaden the definition of highway (i.e. street) robbery. Cases such as these would not have been regarded as sufficiently violent to be prosecuted as highway robberies in the late eighteenth century, but by the early nineteenth century there seems to have been an attempt to widen the offence to include hustling. Since the police worked closely with magistrates, some justices were probably involved in this attempted expansion of the law.⁶² It may have reflected an anxiety to reassure the reading public during a time of perceived increase in offending and radical popular discontent. The newspaper sample reveals several cases of this attempt at

⁶¹ Ibid., p 7; p13.

⁶² Paul Lawrence has found that the police similarly attempted to stretch the terms of the Vagrancy Act as well in order to secure convictions, but this was resisted by many on the bench. P Lawrence, 'The Vagrancy Act (1824) and the Persistence of Pre-emptive Policing in England since 1750', *British Journal of Criminology*, (forthcoming).

broadening the terms of the law. In October 1816 Thomas Boucker was tried at the Old Bailey for feloniously assaulting sailor John Perry, taking from him the sum of five shillings and six pence. The prisoner owned a boat, and the plaintiff had asked Boucker take him to Wales. On the journey, Boucker requested his fare – six shillings and six pence, but Perry offered to pay only one shilling. Boucker responded violently and beat Perry, directly taking five shillings and six pence out of his pocket and carefully returning the change. At this point, the Common Sergeant closed the trial, insisting that since the money was owed as a fare, it was not, therefore, a highway robbery.⁶³ Later in the session he added that ‘the crime of highway robbery had become so frequent an offence that it was necessary to put a stop to it, if possible, by some exemplary punishment’. But clearly this prosecution was expanding the felony beyond credibility, and was resisted by many. There was also an attempt to broaden the definition of force, a highly subjective legal concept. The line between robbery and larceny from the person was a fine one since the offences clearly overlapped: much depended upon how victim and police wished to define the term ‘violence’.⁶⁴ When Isaac Davis and Moss Jacobs were tried for feloniously assaulting and robbing Margaret Quinland of two shawls and cash in 1815, the Old Bailey considered the level of force used: if the shawl had been simply snatched, this was not sufficient to constitute robbery and justify a capital sentence, but if the victim resisted and the offenders had nevertheless secured the items, that would have been appropriate to a highway robbery.⁶⁵

This ‘debate’ was played out in the press. In 1821 W Crighton, ‘a very respectable-looking man’ was prosecuted for a highway robbery against ‘a prostitute of the lowest description’, Charlotte Williams. Attempting to return to Williams’ house, she decided that Crighton was too drunk and tried to leave him. Crighton responded by snatching her shawl. At that moment, a watchman appeared and apprehended Crighton, even though Williams had made no complaint. The Common Sergeant addressed the jury ‘that there was no pretence whatever for calling this a highway robbery’ and the jury ‘entirely concurred in this opinion’, presumably on the grounds the force used was insufficient to put Williams in fear of her life. The court may also have been influenced by the respective moralities and social status of the parties involved. Mr Andrews, defence counsel, exploited the situation further with damning criticism of the watch, stating that the initiative to prosecute had been taken by the officer, and scathingly added that ‘the inhabitants of the parish to which he

⁶³ *Times* 1 October 1816.

⁶⁴ Shore, *Underworlds*, p 83.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

belonged ought to know what sort of guardian of their lives and property they had'. The Common Sergeant reinforced this by stating that the watchman's 'conduct has been infamous to the last degree', his conduct should be reported to the parish and his expenses refused.⁶⁶ This was a highly relevant debate at this time, when considerable discretion about appropriate levels of violence used in a crime was being exercised in order to obtain a successful conviction.⁶⁷ The inclusion of such details in their newspapers would have reassured readers that the law was not administered arbitrarily but with care and thought, therefore helping to affirm the legitimacy of even the harshest of criminal laws.

This was not the first attempt at the Old Bailey to stretch the meaning of highway robbery. It was found necessary to reiterate to police (and the magistrates who referred cases to the courts) that force commensurate to the charge of highway robbery was essential for a guilty verdict. In October 1816 Charles Williams *alias* Varney, 27, was indicted for robbing Thomas Cotter of his watch, seals and chain on the night of 6 October. Although the prosecutor, due to intoxication, was not able to identify his attacker, witnesses were positive that Williams was the culprit. Nevertheless Mr Justice Dallas told the jury that the prosecutor had not been put in fear of his life, and the law would only permit a charge of stealing from the person. He further observed that 'he considered this distinction in point of law necessary to be stated to them, though, at the same time, no rational being could doubt the turpitude of the prisoner's conduct'. The jury duly found him guilty as requested.⁶⁸ James Mitchell was indicted at the Old Bailey in December 1816 for robbing Mr Sterry of his watch, chain and seals in Catherine Street. The defendant, it was alleged, 'had pushed against and hustled [the victim] with considerable violence, and then pretended to assist to prevent his falling, [holding] the prosecutor's arms so very tight' that he could not prevent his pockets being rifled. However, the jury found Mitchell guilty of stealing the watch, 'but not with force and violence'.⁶⁹ Newspaper reportage of such cases is likely to have had a mixed response by readers. On the one hand, they would have been reassured by the apparent concern for the proper execution of the criminal law whilst they may also have wished for more severe sentencing. By reporting such cases the press was able to sustain a 'narrative of authority' among its middle class readership.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 12 December 1821.

⁶⁷ Shore, *Underworlds*, p 83.

⁶⁸ *Morning Chronicle* 31 October 1816.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 6 December 1816.

Table 4.2

**Levels of Violence in Newspaper Reports for Highway Robbery and Burglary
Aug-Dec 1816, 1821, and 1828**

Level of Violence	Robbery	Burglary
Threat only	35 24%	76 49%
Mild violence	54 37%	49 32%
Weapons	23 16%	25 16%
Serious violence &/or weapon used	25 17%	5 3%
Murder/attempted murder (of victim)	9 6%	0 0%
TOTAL	146 100%	155 100%

Source: *Times; Observer; Examiner; Globe; Morning Chronicle*; Aug-Dec 1816, 1821, 1828

Many street robberies were very violent and the press tended to exploit this aspect of a crime knowing that it held a fascination for many readers. Instances of reported violence are common in newspaper reports of street robberies. (See Table 4.2) One Tuesday evening in late October 1821, Mr Blackmoor was travelling to his home at Wandsworth when he was robbed of his gold watch, chain and seals and 'in fact every pocket was empty except one'. He was beaten so badly by his assailant(s) 'that he did not recover his recollections or senses until next morning, to the great distress of his family who did not know what had become of him during the whole of the night'.⁷⁰ It would seem that newspaper editors deliberately selected instances of street robberies for the extreme level of violence displayed in the attack. 3. 23% (24 instances) of street robbery involved the most serious cases of violence, including nine reports of murder or attempted murder. In October 1828 William Soucees, a ninety year old retired farmer, was found murdered, 'his head mangled in a shocking manner, his pockets turned inside out, and his money gone'.⁷¹ Some of these accounts were published out of macabre interest. When Mr Newman was attacked by four assailants near Ingress Park, Gravesend, the twelve and a half line account of the incident contained eight lines describing the aggressive behaviour of the robbers.⁷² In October or early November 1828 a man named Hunt made an extraordinary deathbed

⁷⁰ *Examiner* 28-29 October 1821.

⁷¹ *Observer* 20 October 1828.

⁷² *Morning Chronicle* 5 September 1828.

confession which the press reported with evident delight. About ten years earlier Hunt, with four other men had robbed a waggoner who had died during the robbery, and it had been assumed that the victim had died accidentally. Facing death, Hunt suffered with his conscience, and he admitted that he, with others, had placed the victim's head under the cartwheel and deliberately driven over the victim ensuring certain death.⁷³ Furthermore the press was keen to invent violence where none may have been used. In the late autumn of 1821, a young gentleman was found with 'a dreadful fracture in his head, near the Adam and Eve [public house], Kensington'. It was discovered that the man was Archibald Douglas, 'the son of – Douglas, Esq. of Dorset Street, Mayfair'. Since there were no witnesses, robbery could not be proved by the jury, and the victim may simply have fallen from his horse. Nevertheless the newspaper clearly expressed the view that 'he had been robbed and inhumanly beaten, from the circumstances of his seals and keys being missing'. However, the victim's watch, fob and six sovereigns remained on his person.⁷⁴

It is difficult to ascertain whether robberies were as violent, more violent or less forceful than before. Contemporary opinion was mixed: some believed that the streets of London were safer whilst others thought that violent crime was on the increase. Hustling was a less aggressive form of street robbery and was a crime particularly emphasised by the press. But reported conventional street robberies were apparently as violent as ever. The emphasis on hustling is perhaps misleading: as we saw in the previous chapter, the crime had existed since the late 1780s, but it was only in the early nineteenth-century that the press started to emphasise its novelty and danger. Newspapers were starting to develop 'themes' in reporting crime by stressing the prevalence of particular kinds of offences and the dangers arising from them. In this period, the press stressed in particular burglary, juvenile offending, the risk of servant crime and overall the perceived emergence of a 'criminal class' and 'underworld' as well as hustling and street robbery. The remainder of this chapter will now analyse press reporting of each of these offences/thematic areas in turn.

Burglary

Reporting burglaries became an important feature of the early nineteenth century press, becoming more significant than accounts of street robberies. In the 1780s, street robbery accounts had been far more numerous than descriptions of house thefts, but by the early nineteenth century burglary reports slightly outnumbered robbery reports (155 compared

⁷³ Ibid., 2 November 1828.

⁷⁴ *Examiner* 28-29 October 1821.

to 146). There are several possible reasons for this. First, editors were clearly coming to view burglaries as more newsworthy events, perhaps because the principal targets of thieves were the homes or businesses of the better off. Second, it was possible to provide far more detail about a burglary than it was usually possible for a robbery on the highway. A greater variety of property was stolen – not only personal possessions, but also furniture, plate and even the means of livelihood, such as tools. In contrast to the 1780s when the press were often coy about burglars' methods, the ever ingenious ways used by burglars to obtain entry to a property was a topic of fascinating interest to newspapers and utilitarian value to householders. Furthermore, it was easier for the propertied newspaper reader to identify and empathise with the victims of burglars, who were people similar to themselves. Finally it touched upon the developing interest in domesticity amongst the better-off.⁷⁵ As London grew in size, not only were there more houses to rob, but growing affluence meant that there were more valuable items to steal. The period had witnessed a consumer revolution principally among the privileged, but it was also spread amongst a larger part of society than before.⁷⁶ After 1815, the rich became richer as possibly did some of the poor – especially if they were fortunate enough to remain in work and enjoy good health. London's role in the Industrial Revolution was a commercial one providing wealth and employment for many, and since public sanitation and public health were much improved, these pre-conditions were satisfied.⁷⁷ Since London was the biggest centre of conspicuous consumption and the most affluent community in the country, its capacity for fashion and trend setting was phenomenal. Such opportunities for personal-lifestyle enhancement gave greater opportunities and more temptations to burglars and street robbers, who envied the material success of the better off.

Burglary reports steadily increased year on year in the sample years of 1816, 1821 and 1828. (See Figure 4.2) Over the late summer, autumn and early winter there were 155 burglary reports in the newspapers studied. Rising from 52 accounts in 1816, with a fall in 1821 to 43 reports, there was an all-time high of 60 reports in 1828, suggesting to readers that house thefts were getting out of hand. Robbery reports fluctuated from 49 in 1816, to 39 (1821) and a high of 56 incidents in 1828. Thus there were slightly more burglary

⁷⁵ A Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors. At Home in Georgian England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009).

⁷⁶ N McKendrick, 'Introduction', in N McKendrick, J Brewer, and JH Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society. The Commercialization of Eighteenth Century England* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982), pp 1-6 (p 1).

⁷⁷ LD Schwarz, *London in the age of industrialisation: entrepreneurs, labour force and living conditions, 1700-1850* (Cambridge University Press, paperback edn 2003).

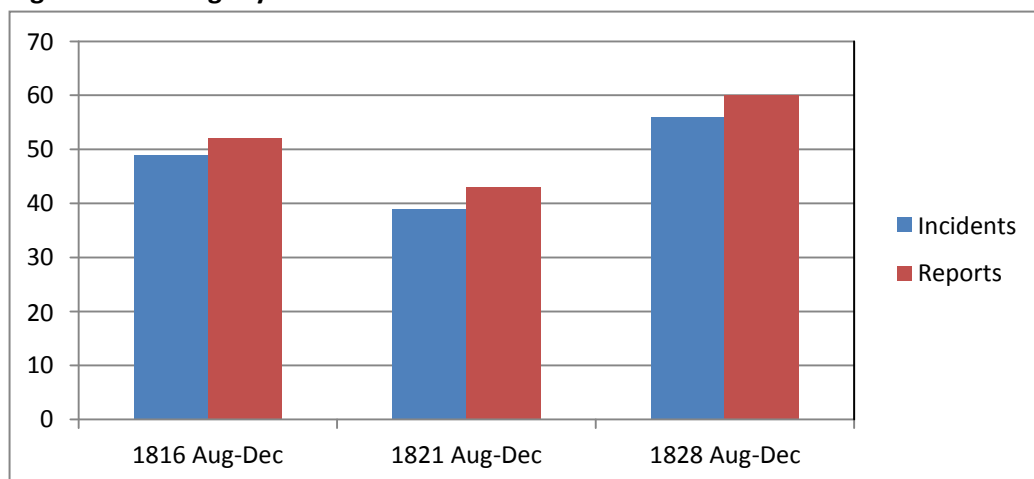
accounts (155) than there were for street robbery (144) – a reversal of the 1780s trend.

These years may be untypical, but they do suggest a growing interest in reporting burglaries by newspaper editors, (as well as fluctuating levels of house theft).

The proportionate increase may indicate a growing number of burglaries and fewer street robberies. Guilty verdicts for robbery at the Old Bailey declined from 23 for the period August to December 1816, to 11 for the same period in 1821 and 14 in 1828. (See Table 4.3) However, although the same pattern of verdicts at the Old Bailey for burglary and housebreaking are not reflected in the number of press *reports*, the number of *incidents* of specific crimes mirror newspaper accounts. (See Table 4.5) Thus in 1816 there were 52 incidents of robberies and burglaries contained in 58 reports;

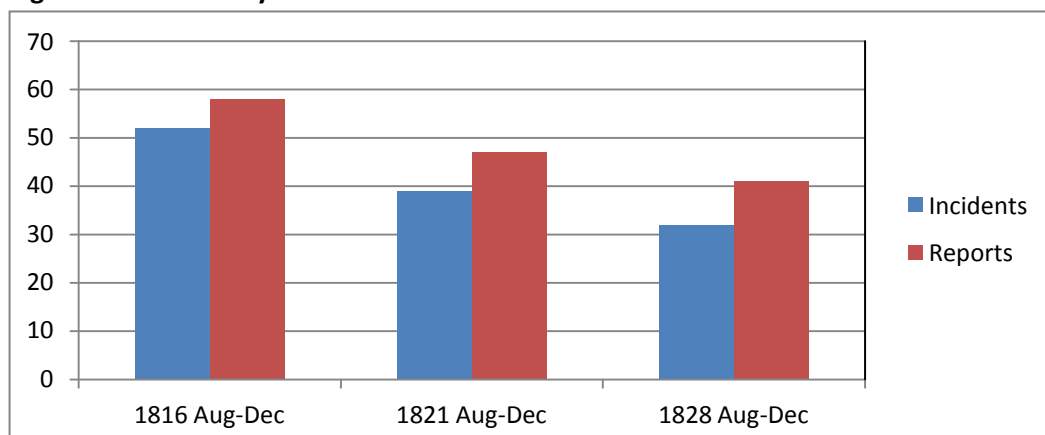
Incidents and Reports of Highway Robbery and Burglary in Newspapers, Aug-Dec 1816, 1821, 1828

Figure 4.2a : Burglary



Source: *The Times; Observer, Examiner, Globe; Morning Chronicle*: Aug-Dec 1816, 1821, 1828

Figure 4.2b : Robbery



Source: *The Times; Observer, Examiner, Globe; Morning Chronicle*: Aug-Dec 1816, 1821, 1828

similarly in 1828 the respective figures are 32 and 41. Newspaper reports and reported incidents therefore follow a similar trajectory but press reporting did not reflect 'real' levels of offending.⁷⁸

Table 4.3 Old Bailey Trials for Robbery and Burglary with guilty verdicts, Aug-Dec 1816, 1821 and 1828.

Date	Robbery	Burglary
1816 Aug-Dec	23	52
1821 Aug-Dec	11	20
1828 Aug-Dec	14	36

Source: OBSP

Table 4.4 Length of Newspaper Reports for Highway Robbery and Burglary, Aug-Dec 1816, 1821 and 1828.

Length of column	Robbery	Burglary
Few lines	56 38%	28 18%
Under ¼ col (approx. 10 lines)	45 31%	31 20%
Over ¼ col	22 15%	33 21%
Up to ½ col	20 14%	40 26%
Over ½ col	3 2%	23 15%
TOTAL	146 100%	155 100%

Source: *Times; Observer; Examiner; Globe; Morning Chronicle*; Aug-Dec 1816, 1821, 1828

Editors were not representing the true incidence of the crime but were developing an interest in reporting this felony because it was becoming increasingly newsworthy. Thus

⁷⁸ Unless, of course, Old Bailey trial numbers were increasingly unrepresentative.

although trial accounts in newspapers covered only 62 trials, when there were 108 trials for these offences with a guilty verdict at the Old Bailey, newspapers were describing an increasing proportion of those trials: 25 out of a possible 52 in 1816, 13 out of 20 in 1821 and 23 out of 36 in 1828. Furthermore, more attention in terms of dedicated column space was given to house thefts than street robbery, although this did not change significantly over the sample years. Only 28 (18%) of burglary reports were short accounts of only a few lines compared with 38% (56) of street robbery descriptions. A full 15% of reports (23) for burglary were of the longest length whereas only 2% (3) reports of street robberies fit into this category. These facts may further reflect a perceived interest of readers in burglary by readers by editors. It may be, following Shoemaker, that the public had lost interest in highway robbery since the felony had lost its colourful characters and *modus operandi* and degenerated into violent thuggery.⁷⁹

Even though they did not report all of the crimes committed, newspapers presented burglary and housebreaking incidents as relatively common. Nearly all of the offences described took place in greater London and the South East: none were reported for the North. Table 4.5 shows that there were seasonal trends in reporting house thefts. Newspapers consistently described burglaries as occurring in the autumn and winter when

Table 4.5 Seasonal distribution of Burglary Reports in Newspapers, Aug-Dec 1816, 1821 and 1828.

Month	Numbers	%
Aug	14	9
Sept	35	23
Oct	35	23
Nov	39	25
Dec	32	20
TOTAL	155	100

Source: *Times; Observer; Examiner; Globe; Morning Chronicle*; Aug-Dec 1816, 1821, 1828.

⁷⁹ RB Shoemaker, 'The Street Robber and the Gentleman Highwayman', 381-405.

the nights were darker: on average, only 9% (14) of burglaries took place in August whereas 23% (35) were in September and the same number in October. They were at their highest level in November. A further one fifth took place in December, a marginally less popular month, perhaps, because of poorer weather. It was not presented as an overly violent crime, especially when compared with street robberies. Only 3% (5) of the burglaries reported upon contained serious violence, such as wounding, there were no murders or attempted murders involved, and in 76 instances (49%) there was no aggression or only verbal threats were used. By contrast street robberies involved 9 (6%) murders or attempted murders, and 25 (17%) of reported incidents involved serious violence. Perhaps due to the less forceful offence of hustling, 35 street robberies (24%) had no reported violence. Burglary was a less violent crime because it rarely involved direct confrontation with victims.

Table 4.6 Occupations of Victims of Highway Robbery and Burglary in Newspaper Reports, Aug-Dec 1816, 1821 and 1828

Occupation	Robbery	Burglary	Total	%
Servants/employees	4	1	5	14
Agricultural workers	1	1	2	6
Shopkeepers	2	8	10	28
Doctors/lawyers	5	4	9	26
Factory owners	1	8	9	26
TOTAL	13	22	35	100

Source: *Times; Observer; Examiner; Globe; Morning Chronicle*; Aug-Dec 1816, 1821, 1828.

It was often the better off that were presented in the press as being the victims of burglars and street robbers. (See Table 4.6) This may reflect reality as the poorest would have had little of value worth stealing. Although the occupational status of only 35 victims is stated, a mere 20% of victims held menial positions (servants and agricultural workers), but 28% were middle class shopkeepers and 25% were professionals (doctors or lawyers) and the same number were factory owners. Where a title is given indicating social status (18% of reports) 48 (89%) are for the middling respectable 'Mr', and only 6 (11%) for the

more prestigious 'Sir' or 'Lord'. The bourgeoisie was, according to press reports, the principal target of burglars and housebreakers.

'Celebrity' and rich victims were awarded the greatest amount of newsprint. Extensive coverage was given, for example, to the robbery of the Watford residence of Colonel Whateley, Groom to the Bedchamber of the King. Whilst visiting friends, his home was robbed of its plate chest. The method of entry to the property and the difficulties involved in breaking open the chest were all reported in great detail. The press speculated that the job had been effected by experienced 'cracksmen' 'from the workmanlike way in which it was accomplished', and strangers seen at an auction were 'it is supposed [...] experienced housebreakers'.⁸⁰ Similarly, the robbery of the French Ambassador's residence attracted a great deal of attention not least because, although the ambassador was abroad, the Princess and her family were in residence.⁸¹ Such stories were of great interest to many readers but were perhaps more entertaining and less threatening to them than accounts of robberies of people more like themselves.

Similarly those with wealth attracted the attention of criminals and editors alike. Unsurprisingly jewellers were the most attractive target for burglars. A spate of burglaries of wealthy jewellers was the focus of much press speculation. In September 1821 the *Morning Chronicle* gave notice of the theft of property worth £500 from the shop of Mr Solomon, silversmith, in Piccadilly (or Pall Mall). The intruders had torn out the iron grating and plundered four gold watches, four gold and silver musical snuff boxes, several 'curious' silver watches, some cashmere shawls and 'a number of very valuable diamond rings, &c.'⁸² Professionals too had their homes violated relatively frequently. According to press accounts: doctors and lawyers, for example were robbed 9 times (6% of reports).

The key themes in burglary accounts are those of vulnerability and the violation of victims: preventative security measures in this period were still primitive and inadequate compared to mid-Victorian times, for example.⁸³ The robbery of the Warrington household in 1828 attracted a great deal of press coverage because the family were tied up, dragged downstairs and locked in a vault by intruders. The account of the robbery emphasised the fear and apprehension that was almost certainly felt by the family by describing the

⁸⁰ *Globe* 19 December 1828.

⁸¹ *Observer* 1 December 1828.

⁸² *Morning Chronicle* 14 September 1821; 15 September 1821.

⁸³ D Churchill, 'The spectacle of security: lock-picking competitions and the security industry in mid-Victorian Britain', *History Workshop Journal*, 80 (1), (2015), 52-74.

thieves' roughness and an attempt to kindness by one of them. The press noted that the family had returned home after a break and, alarmingly, 'during their absence there is every reason to believe the robbers, by some means (to which we cannot at present even allude), obtained a thorough knowledge of the interior of the premises, and the habits of the family'.⁸⁴ Typically the newspaper's source for this 'knowledge' is not stated, and is little more than speculation.

In descriptions of burglaries newspapers frequently wrote their accounts very freely and with an imaginative style from the perspective of the victim(s) and assessing the likely impact the robbery would have had upon their lives. A Mrs Poole had advertised a suite of rooms to let, and three men, one claiming noble status responded. The latter claimed 'it would be necessary to have a handsome supply of [fine plate]' and agreed to rent the rooms. During a temporary absence by Poole, the men took her plate, gold watch, chain and seals, valued at more than one hundred pounds. However the paper empathised and stressed that this was not her

only loss or inconvenience [...] for she has by it been actually driven from her house altogether. So much alarmed, it appears, was Mrs Poole after the robbery, and having no person with her in the house but one female servant, that she would not venture to go to bed that night, lest, as she had so perfect a knowledge of the faces of the robbers, as well they must know, they might return and murder her in the night...

Remaining awake for several nights she eventually heard an attempted entry into her property using false keys and witnessed two men fleeing the scene. Confirmed in her terror, the next day she sold all her furniture and moved to a different neighbourhood, having furnished the property to a high standard in order to let it.⁸⁵ The press reported that house robberies could similarly frighten a neighbourhood. In December 1828, Mrs Johnstone had been robbed of five chests and other valuables. She alleged that 'the robberies were now so frequent in the neighbourhood in which she resided, attended with such daring circumstances, that the inhabitants were fearful of going to bed at night, and she hoped Sir Richard [Birnie] would do all in his power to afford them the protection of the police'. Birnie reassured the victim he would send Morgan, 'one of the most active patrol' who would 'render every assistance in his power'.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ *Observer* 1 December 1828.

⁸⁵ *Observer* 1 December 1828.

⁸⁶ *Globe* 2 December 1828.

Newspaper reports confirmed that a burglary could also ruin a family's livelihood. In December 1828 four young male imposters robbed the proprietor of the Savoy Palace Tavern, Mr Lanman. They took £70 in cash, bills worth £300, a post-obit bond for £450 'with a considerable interest due upon it' as well as three dozen silver spoons, six salt spoons and two silver mugs, and a further £70 was taken from an adjoining apartment. The newspaper sympathetically reported that 'Miss Lanman and her father shed tears during the investigation, being apprehensive that the robbery would cause their ruin [...] Mr Lanman had only commenced business as a tavern keeper a very short time, and, it is said, this loss will be the total ruin of himself and family'. Fortunately for the household the thieves returned the post-obit bond and some others which were payable only to Lanman and therefore worthless to the thieves.⁸⁷ The robberies of Poole, Johnstone and Lanman all occurred in December 1828, and the cumulative impact upon London newspaper readers was probably considerable. A comment by Sir Richard Birnie at the time claiming that the high number of burglaries was due to victims' carelessness with their property would have failed to reassure many worried Londoners.⁸⁸

Problems with dishonest employees

Whilst newspapers presented burglary as a serious problem for householders and shop owners alike, the press highlighted in particular the risks and dangers to employers from employees and dissatisfied former employees – especially important for an emerging capitalist urban economy. This theme was particularly emphasised by the press in 1828. According to the press, middling factory owners were vulnerable to corrupt workers. In 1828, for example, *The Globe* provided the case of Thomas Hall, a porter, who was often left in charge of a carpet warehouse. The paper reported that he was accustomed to invite David Evans and John Collins, servants out of place, and James Chamberlain, another porter, to the warehouse. Hall had intended to steal wine but his companions conceived a plan to steal carpets. Expecting objections the men drugged Hall before the thefts took place. Eventually they succeeded in corrupting Hall himself, but he confessed when the robberies were discovered. However when Evans was searched, a discovery was made that probably caused more concern amongst the employing classes than news of the robberies themselves. As well laudanum 'which he, no doubt, used in any house to which, as a visitor, he found access, as he had a Messrs Riley and Lapworth', documents were found. These were character references used by out of place servants. They were deployed, the paper

⁸⁷ Ibid., 8 December 1828.

⁸⁸ *Examiner* 7 December 1828.

informed its readers, by men like Evans, to 'find their way onto the services of families for the sole purpose of making themselves acquainted with all the intricacies and fastenings of the house, with a view to burglary and robbery hereafter'. The newspaper, claiming its findings an 'exclusive', added that 'the manner in which these false characters (for such they always are) are supplied to these robbers has never, perhaps, before come to light, and when stated will seem almost incredible'.⁸⁹

The journal strongly hinted that the activities of Evans, and others like him, and the supply of false documents, was part of a wider organised criminal conspiracy working against the interests of the propertied. The paper claimed that there were so called 'gentlemen' ('robbers themselves of course') masquerading under the title 'of Colonel this, or Captain that', living in West End hotels, who kept gigs and horses 'and [were] supposed to be persons of respectability and character'. These men 'it seems [...] are all know to each other'. For between five shillings and five guineas, these rogues, it was alleged, would supply false character references, priced according to the status of employment sought and the quality of the family. If a potential employer enquired at the hotel about the referee, 'it is found that the person signing it is really stopping there, and is supposed to be a gentleman of independent property, [and] thus all suspicion is set to rest'. Once in position, the servants behave well 'until they become perfectly acquainted with the situation at night of all the valuable property, plate &c in the place, and the most easy mode of finding access to it by a burglary'. They then commit a misdemeanour – like inebriation – in order to be dismissed and a burglary would occur soon after. The newspaper finished its lengthy account warning that 'Too much caution cannot, therefore, be exercised as to what servants families receive into their establishments'.⁹⁰ This editorial comment touched upon a raw nerve of middle and upper class anxiety: who to trust and admit into their homes in this teeming metropolis?

Newspapers also reported that servants, especially former employees, could hold grudges against their employers. In October 1828 Israel Harrod was examined by a magistrate on a charge of burglary. Harrod, 'a very fine looking young man [...] with [...] an appearance and manner very superior to what is generally met with in his class in life', had been valet and footman to Humphrey St John Mildmay Esq. who had discharged him. Mildmay discovered %40 in notes and five sovereigns missing from his bureau drawer. To commit the robbery the former servant had hidden in a coal cellar. 'As he knew every inch of the way', he

⁸⁹ *Globe* 22 December 1828.

⁹⁰ *Globe* 22 December 1828

proceeded directly to Mildmay's study and left avoiding a tell-tale creaky door. Harrod stated that he could not give any reason for robbing his former master, except extreme dissatisfaction since his discharge. Mildmay claimed this was due to his missing 'a vast quantity of wearing apparel of all sorts; indeed to an extent that almost stripped his wardrobe at the time', and he had no doubt that Harrod was responsible. Officers found Mildmay's clothes including 'no less than 21 beautiful shirts [...] and all marked with Mr Mildmay's name in full' at the home of Harrod's respectable widowed mother.⁹¹ The level of detail provided in newspaper accounts such as these would have alarmed many elite and middle class readers, as they touched upon an inherent weakness in their household's security, namely, the criminality of their servants who shared their homes. As the Select Committee on the Police in 1828 was told, 'There is no more dangerous person upon earth than a discarded gentleman's servant'.⁹²

The press also reported problems with female servants. Women could steal from their place of employment, especially if they were in domestic service, more easily and comfortably than in almost any other setting. It was a location that offered temptations and opportunities, and newspapers regularly took the opportunity to report such cases in great detail. This was not new: female servants' thefts from their employers was already a well-known phenomenon in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and was frequently a topic of popular broadsides and was described in publications like the *Old Bailey Sessions Papers*.⁹³ As a class, they were large in number: at the beginning of the previous century as many as 70% of the female work force had possibly been in service.⁹⁴ At Old Bailey trials in the late eighteenth century one third of reports concerned live – in or ex-servants.⁹⁵ Female servants were vulnerable to exploitation, low incomes and the threat of unemployment, especially if they became ill or pregnant.⁹⁶ The press showed little interest in describing the 'shocking' nature of the crime itself, and empathising with the victims. In November 1821 Susan May was examined on a charge of robbing her master, the landlord of the Portland Arms, Great Marylebone Street. His daughter had missed her watch, pocket book and silver coins as well as some of her sister's clothing. An officer

⁹¹ *Times* 24 October 1828.

⁹² Tobias, *Crime and Industrial Society*, p 199.

⁹³ P Humfrey, 'Female Servants and Women's Criminality in Early Eighteenth – Century London', in GT Smith et al (eds), *Criminal Justice in the Old World and the New. Essays in Honour of JM Beattie* (Toronto: Center of Criminology, University of Toronto, 1998), pp 58-84 (p 59).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p 62.

⁹⁵ P King, 'Female offenders, work and life – cycle change in late eighteenth – century London', *Continuity and Change* 11 (1) (1996), 61-90 (75).

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 76.

discovered the missing items in May's mother's apartment, and May confessed to taking them.⁹⁷ Former employees were particularly suspect as they had inside knowledge, possibly a grudge and had the advantage that they would not be discovered on the premises with the property afterwards. Furthermore ex – employees always had difficulty finding further employment.⁹⁸ In October 1816 Jane Cater was arrested. It was alleged that as a former servant to Mrs Williams, she had visited another servant, but instead of leaving the property, she entered the plate room, removed silver and linen valued at 25 guineas and hid in the lumber room for three days. When Cater was discovered, she was faint through lack of food and water. She and her male partner were both arrested.⁹⁹ A major problem, claimed the press, lay in the romantic or familial attachments of young female servants. Relationships were cultivated by criminals (and their close relatives) with the ulterior objective of robbing a properly. The numbers prosecuted (and therefore liable to be reported in the press) under these circumstances was small, but according to Beattie the offence may have been much more common.¹⁰⁰ In October 1828 Joseph Mahony *alias* Loowle and John Morris ('two well-known thieves') were charged with having entered the premises of Mr Barron, a builder, in St Martin's Lane and stealing plate. It was clear from the circumstances that the thieves had inside knowledge. The Watch found Mahony in hiding, and it emerged that Barron's female servant was related. Even though the servant knew Mahony's reputation as a thief and his character was 'not very good', she had nevertheless let him enter Barron's house on a number of occasions. When *The Times* reported magistrate Sir Richard Birnie's comment that the 'public could never be safe if servants were to act as she had done', he touched upon one of the deepest social anxieties facing middle class and elite readers: the security of their property from light fingered servants. Barron had previously valued the servant sufficiently enough to provide her with medical care, and despite the evidence, he continued to believe in her honesty.¹⁰¹

The nature of female servant offending fundamentally reflected the emerging capitalist economy as employees became more dependent upon wage labour and were less bound by affective ties to the household. Female servants had become intruders in the domesticated family setting, encroaching on patriarchal relationships.¹⁰² This may have

⁹⁷ *Times* 7 November 1821.

⁹⁸ King, 'Female offenders', 76.

⁹⁹ *Morning Chronicle* 8 October 1816.

¹⁰⁰ JM Beattie, 'The Criminality of Women in Eighteenth – Century England', *Journal of Social History* 8 (4), (1975), 80-116 (92).

¹⁰¹ *Times* 17 October 1828.

¹⁰² Humfrey, 'Female servants', p 64; p 68

enabled economically marginalised women to steal more willingly from the household.¹⁰³ Furthermore, densely populated London offered freedom and the urban environment was perceived by contemporaries as 'enlarging consciousness of self, encouraging unnatural desires for clothes and entertainment that would lead inevitably to social disorder, rebelliousness, idleness and crime.'¹⁰⁴ And women more often found themselves in difficulty in urban London than they had done in rural villages and small market towns.¹⁰⁵ Although the female servant class was often seen as at best unreliable and often criminal, there were some newspaper reports of the positive roles employees played when faced with burglars. When Mr Hopkins, a coachmaker, was burgled, the female servant, instead of screaming, locked the intruder into a room 'with the coolest intrepidity' and then informed the family. Although the offender succeeded in making off with 'a considerable quantity of plate', *The Globe* commented

had the female been a quarter of an hour later, property to a much greater amount would have been taken away, and had she screamed out, it is possible she would have been murdered.¹⁰⁶

And when Mrs Seppings was robbed and assaulted at home by three thieves, the female servant, 'determined if possible to obtain assistance', jumped out of the window, 'which she did at the risk of her life', and obtained the assistance of two men and a boy who raised an alarm, which frightened the thieves, who escaped taking very little with them.¹⁰⁷ Thus a newspaper offered, on occasion, a more reassuring message to householders about the ability of their female servants to help protect the household from criminals through their bravery and conscientiousness.

Female crime

Since women were rarely violent in their thefts, when they stole they typically used elements of deception or non-violent threats to obtain money or goods. Alice Thomas was committed in November 1828 for stealing two silver desert spoons from the home of Mr Robert Barber in Oxford Road, having gained access to the property by begging. She had a prior conviction for a similar offence.¹⁰⁸ In December 1821 Sarah Bishop was indicted for

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ JM Beattie, *Crime and the Courts in England 1660-1800* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p 241.

¹⁰⁵ JM Beattie, "'Hard-pressed to make ends meet'". Women and crime in Augustan London', in V Frith (ed), *Women and History. Voices of Early Modern England* (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1995), pp 103-115 (p 106).

¹⁰⁶ *Globe* 8 December 1828.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 20 December 1828.

¹⁰⁸ *Observer* 14 November 1828.

inciting Susannah Burman to rob her own father, a respectable baker. Bishop was a lodger 'and so great was her influence over the silly girl that her wishes were always gratified in one shape or another'. Bishop encouraged the younger sister to plunder her father as well. The thefts continued for several years, and Bishop obtained money for coals, theatre tickets and luxuries.¹⁰⁹ Women tended to steal more frequently from those they know because their social boundaries were more limited than men's.¹¹⁰ Most commonly, females were accessories to males. In September 1828 William Heath and Mary Crowder *alias* Heath, a widow, were indicted. William was charged with breaking and entering the home of Edward Hopping and stealing articles valued between £400 - £500, and Mary was accused of receiving. The case was dismissed even though William was found to possess housebreaking tools.¹¹¹ The perception that women acted primarily as accessories was a strong one and was reinforced by press reports. When Margaret Gilson and Sarah Doyle were apprehended for robbery in the winter of 1821, Gilson's lodgings were searched and officers discovered a set of housebreaking instruments, two silver spoons and a silver watch in a trunk. Despite Gilson admitting the trunk was her own, she was not believed. She then claimed it belonged to Richard Stolrock, a transportee. Gilson was discharged with a simple warning 'to be more guarded in future in the selection of her companions'.¹¹² In at least one way, the criminal law protected married women since they were not answerable for crimes committed in the presence of their husbands – it was presumed that they acted under his instructions.¹¹³ The principle of *feme covert* may have helped to keep many females out of the courts and, therefore, the newspapers.¹¹⁴ Women acted as accomplices in a variety of ways: receiving, acting as 'look-outs' and prostitutes might start a riot in a public house to draw police attention away from a nearby burglary.¹¹⁵ Women's clothing was also useful for concealing stolen items.¹¹⁶

According to press reports, women were therefore *implicated* relatively frequently in the illicit removal of goods or money from homes or businesses but were not acting as the principal agents. They may have already been resident in the property as a servant, or used

¹⁰⁹ *Observer* 10 December 1821

¹¹⁰ Lynn Mackay, 'Why they stole: women in the Old Bailey, 1779-1789' *Journal of Social History*, 32, (1999), 623-639 (628-9).

¹¹¹ *Times* 17 September 1828.

¹¹² *Times* 9 November 1821.

¹¹³ JJ Tobias, *Crime and Industrial Society in the 19th century* (London: Batsford, 1967), p 93.

¹¹⁴ Emsley, *Crime and Society*, p98. However according to King, the numbers of women before the courts continued to fall *after* the principle fell into disuse (*ibid*).

¹¹⁵ Tobias, *Crime and Industrial Society*, p 92.

¹¹⁶ Emsley, *Crime and Society*, p 99.

deception rather than tools, or else acted as accessories to males. This finding is supported by evidence from the eighteenth century courts. In urban Surrey between 1660 and 1800, women accounted for only 16.1% of the accused in burglary cases and 40.2% in housebreaking charges.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, robbery and burglary account for about 20% of men's offences, but only 8% of women's.¹¹⁸ These figures may reflect a greater unwillingness to prosecute women, and some may have been protected by *feme covert* but this in itself is unlikely to account for such a great difference.¹¹⁹ Women stole for the same reasons as men: as a means of survival or supplementing low wages.¹²⁰ But the methods they used and the social contexts in which they stole were fundamentally different. This is also reflected in the cases reported in the press in cases of street robbery. In cases of robbery women were again relatively under-represented in both court records and newsprint. Between 1660 and 1800 in urban Surrey only 13.4% of those accused of robbery were women.¹²¹ Even in street robberies, females often used deception (such as the lure of sex) before direct confrontation with their victim in a private or semi-private location. Often, such women were prostitutes (or were labelled as such). *The Examiner* reported that at the Old Bailey in October 1821 Anne Norris and Mary Palmer were found guilty of violently assaulting James Thompson and stealing ten shillings from him in Wentworth Street. Palmer had approached Thompson in the street, and asked him to accompany her to a person in distress. Once there, she demanded money for his release and he gave her one shilling. Following further demands, Thompson attempted an escape, but the prisoners and five or six women violently attacked and robbed their victim. When he cried 'murder', he was gagged and threatened with murder. Another attempted escape led to further beatings by some men. Eventually Thompson escaped and the two women were arrested. At the justice's examination Norris and Palmer declared they were 'unfortunate girls (a euphemism for prostitutes) and hoped they would be mercifully dealt with'. In summing up, Mr Justice Park observed 'it was indeed a melancholy reflection that such a transaction as this should have occurred in the mid-day, within a quarter of a mile too of the police office'. He advised magistrates to be 'extremely careful to prevent a repetition of such a disgraceful scene'.¹²²

Women more commonly robbed in the dark, taking advantage of drunk, solicitous, foolish

¹¹⁷ Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, p 239.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p 238.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ Beattie 'Hard-pressed', p 106.

¹²¹ Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, p 239.

¹²² *Examiner* 28-29 October 1821.

or vulnerable men in dark alleys, parks, dead ends, or during sex in more private locations, often ensuring they had a female friend close by to pass stolen goods onto.¹²³ However the offence was probably under reported and under prosecuted: male pride at being beaten by female(s), sexual embarrassment, shame and the difficulties in proving identity in the dark were likely factors contributing to this. Because of the low level of violence involved, women were more likely to be charged with a pickpocketing offence. Robberies involving direct confrontation with the victim were primarily a male offence. At the Old Bailey Gray found that only 11% to 17% of highway robberies involved female offenders.¹²⁴ This finding is reflected in newspaper coverage of the crime. Young women are rarely represented in the press as being involved in hustling – which was primarily a daytime offence on crowded streets, and Table 4.7 confirms Gray’s Old Bailey finding; only 11% of newspaper reports of robberies involve females. This suggests that newspapers tended not to prioritise female crime and that reportage was proportionate to the reality of offending. Furthermore the length of robbery and burglary accounts appearing in the press are not significantly longer or shorter when females are involved in the crime. Nevertheless when women did use force the story became especially newsworthy. Newspapers reflected the gendered nature of crime: as Shore has argued, pickpocketing and robbery were perceived as typically male offences. Female thieves were seen as peripheral to boys and direct theft was seen as typical of a masculine, precocious and assertive character.¹²⁵

Table 4.7

**Offender Gender in Newspaper Reports of Highway Robbery and Burglary
Aug-Dec 1816, 1821 and 1828**

Gender	Robbery	Burglary
Male	130 89%	146 94%
Female	16 11%	9 6%
TOTAL	146 100%	155 100%

Source: *Times; Observer; Examiner; Globe; Morning Chronicle*; Aug-Dec. 1816, 1821, 1828

¹²³ D Palk, ‘Private Crime in Public and Private Places: Pickpockets and Shoplifters in London, 1780=1823’, in T Hitchcock and H Shore (eds), *The Streets of London From the Great Fire to the Great Stink* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 2003), pp 135-150; pp 233-235 (p 145).

¹²⁴ DD Gray, *Crime, Policing and Punishment in England, 1660-1914* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), p.159.

¹²⁵ H Shore, *Artful Dodgers. Youth and Crime in early nineteenth-century London* (Woodbridge and Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2002), p 10; p 59.

The press, therefore, presented a mixed message about the criminality of women in general and female servants in particular. It reassured the public that women were not as criminally active as men, but that female servants could be problematic, especially with family and lovers who could exploit their inside knowledge for mutual gain. A home had little protection from light – fingered servants, who were familiar with family routines and who could move about the house with ease. Women were not as likely to rob in the street outright, but might use deceit or the promise of sex to lure the unsuspecting to a place where they, perhaps with male associates, might violently assault their victim and relieve him of his valuables. Similarly women may have assisted male burglars, perhaps by carrying housebreaking tools or acting as look-outs or decoys. However, the press also carried stories that warmed the middle class heart about servants going beyond their normal range of duties to protect their employers and their families.

Juvenile offenders

By the 1820s almost half the country was under twenty years of age and children between five and fourteen years old comprised one quarter of the population.¹²⁶ Apprenticeship and other forms of social control over young people had been undermined by the development of capitalism. Contemporaries feared that this encouraged a sense of independence which led to juvenile crime.¹²⁷ Their fears were further compounded by early statistics, widely disseminated by the press, and by accounts of crimes committed by young people reported in newspapers.¹²⁸ To what extent was the problem a genuine one or was it a problem perceived mainly through the lens of the press? Most certainly the press chose to represent juvenile crime as a serious problem: 18% of burglary and street robbery reportage concerned young offenders, nearly one third of whom the press complained were allegedly under eight years of age.

Contemporaries were certain that juvenile offending was a genuine problem. An 1816 committee found that

Juvenile Delinquency existed in the metropolis to a very alarming
Extent; that a system was in action, by which these unfortunate Lads

¹²⁶ MJ Weiner, *Reconstructing the Criminal, Culture, Law and Policy in England, 1830-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, paperback edn., 1994), p 17.

¹²⁷ Ibid., pp 17-18.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p15. Since compulsory registration of births was only introduced in 1836, it was not until the 1850s that the age of juvenile offenders could be determined. 'Juvenile' is therefore a fluid term, but newspapers often gave an age based upon appearance or what was stated by the prisoner, which may have been untrue. Cf Tobias, *Crime and Industrial Society*, p 15. The upper age of juvenile delinquents is taken here to be around 19 years of age, as assumed by contemporaries.

were organised into gangs; that they resorted regularly to houses where they planned their enterprises and afterwards divided the produce of their plunder.¹²⁹

In 1818 the Committee of the Society for the Improvement of Prison Discipline and for the Reformation of Juvenile Offenders reported that 'juvenile delinquency has of late years increased to an unprecedented extent and is still rapidly and progressively increasing.'¹³⁰ Later in the century William Augustus Miles reflected on the

Youthful population in the Metropolis devoted to crime, trained to it from infancy, adhering to it from Education and Circumstances, whose connections prevent the possibility of reformation, and whom no Punishment can deter; a race '*sui generis*', different from the rest of Society, not only in thoughts, habits and manners, but even in appearance, possessing, moreover, a language exclusively of their own'.¹³¹

For Miles, the threat posed by youthful crime was reminiscent of a criminal class: a hardened race produced by the unique circumstances of the capital, untamed and potentially untameable, if not rescued in time. It is inaccurate to claim that the 'problem' of the juvenile delinquent was 'invented' in this era, but it was during the period that the concept developed its distinctly modern connotations. It is from this time that elite worries and social constructions of deviant youth were subsequently met with legislation.¹³² It is only from the 1810s that regular and consistent representations of delinquent youth, and inquiries into them, begin to appear with some frequency.¹³³ Scholars such as Peter King agree that there was an increase in the number of juvenile prosecutions, and this information was widely disseminated by the press.

In the autumn of 1816, The *Times* was alarmed that

For some time the neighbourhood of Devonshire Place, New Road and Marylebone has become the scene of the most daring robberies, the greater part of which has been committed by children: within the last week no less than six houses have been successively robbed of property to a great extent.¹³⁴

¹²⁹ Cited by H Shore, *Artful Dogers. Youth and Crime in Early Nineteen-Century London* (Woodbridge and Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2002), p 6.

¹³⁰ Cited by P Horn, *Young Offenders. Juvenile Delinquency, 1700-2000* (Stroud: Anderlay Publishing, 2010), p 9.

¹³¹ WA Miles, *Poverty, mendacity and crime*, ed. H Brandon (London: 1839), p 45.

¹³² Shore, *Dogers*, p 14.

¹³³ S Magarey, 'The Invention of Juvenile Delinquency in Early Nineteenth-Century England', *Labour History* 34 (1978), 11-27.

¹³⁴ *Times* 22 October 1816.

The *Morning Chronicle* concurred.¹³⁵ Youthful crimes were reported in shocked, scandalous terms. When four boys, William Bennett, Charles Curry, John Jones and Thomas Green, aged 15, 16, 17 and 18 years respectively, were sentenced to death for robbing the home of Mr William Amer in Lewisham, the *Globe* commented that 'it was melancholy to witness such a juvenile band of thieves [...] cast to death. They walked from the dock with the most hardened indifference'.¹³⁶ To make matters worse, children could be responsible for multiple crimes, often operating as couples or in groups. Charles Buckmaster and Hugh Kelly were apprehended *in situ* for a burglary at Mr Walcup's home in Devonshire Place. Buckmaster confessed to having an accomplice. A neighbour claimed that his house had just been robbed and its contents were found with Buckmaster.¹³⁷ The *Morning Chronicle* corroborated this account but added that *another* neighbour had been robbed by the same pair; he had resisted shooting them because he thought that the diminutive figures were cats.¹³⁸ Both boys were described by The *Times* as 'notorious thieves'.

Youngsters were often quite skilful and accomplished. Hall and Burton, 'two very young lads' not more than fourteen or fifteen years old, were capitally indicted in 1821 for a burglary at the house of John Draper, a shoemaker. Despite their youth, a newspaper concluded that 'the evidence [...] showed that they were [...] adepts at the art of stealing'.¹³⁹ The boys had stolen the victim's shoes with the aid of string dropped through a window.¹³⁹ Hustling and street robbery were also crimes committed by young males. In the late summer of 1828, William Butler and two other 'lads' (not charged) robbed Francis Welch in the street by tripping him up and wrestling him to the ground. This was despite the paper's observation that 'the prisoner was a poor weak looking little creature and the prosecutor was a stout middle sized man'. The defendant was nevertheless found guilty.¹⁴⁰ Criminal overlords often favoured child protégés because of their nimbleness, speed and flexibility. Newspaper evidence is dominated by young male offending rather than young female crime. Girls tended to be associated with theft as prostitutes and were often seen as the 'cause' of the 'downfall' of boys. They were mainly perceived as a threat to the relative innocence of boys rather than offenders in their own right.¹⁴¹ Two social constructions of

¹³⁵ *Morning Chronicle* 22 October 1816.

¹³⁶ *Globe* 19 December 1828.

¹³⁷ *Times* 22 October 1816.

¹³⁸ *Morning Chronicle* 22 October 1816.

¹³⁹ *Times* 7 December 1821.

¹⁴⁰ *Morning Chronicle* 18 September 1828.

¹⁴¹ H Shore, 'The trouble with boys: gender and the "invention" of the juvenile offender in early nineteenth-century Britain', in ML Arnot and C Usborne (eds), *Gender and Crime in Modern Europe* (London: UCL Press, 1999), pp 75-92 (p 83).

the male offender existed: the loutish violent boy and the cocky delinquent.¹⁴² Although anxiety focused on their premature maturity, fear was based upon elite and middle class constructions of childhood and the threat of families passing on their criminal skills to children. In 1829 Edward Irving asked:

Is not every juvenile delinquent the evidence of a family in which the family bond is weakened and loosened? Is not every dishonest apprentice an evidence of the same? Is not every trustless servant an evidence of the same? every ruined female, every ruined youth, the infinite numbers of unruly and criminal people who now swarm on the surface of this great kingdom, and inundate the streets of this great city, and fill these huge calendars of crime which our judges and juries can hardly find time to dispose of?¹⁴³

Fears were fanned by newspaper reportage. One case in particular took the interest of the press in the winter of 1816, described by *The Times* as ‘the most remarkable system of villainy that has been within the experience of the city police carried on for a number of years’. It touched many of the tender spots of early nineteenth century anxiety about child offending: the innocence, vulnerability and criminality of children, the existence of gangs of hardened professional criminals able and willing to exploit children for their own perfidious ends, the irresponsibility of parents who might ‘pass on’ their criminality to offspring, and the threat of an underclass of offenders. The case involved ‘a little boy’ aged seven or eight years, a gang of ‘desperate housebreakers’ and the child’s parents. In December 1821 a young boy (called either Palmer or Roberts) was taken up by the Watch late at night ‘lurking suspiciously’ in Thames Street. When examined, ‘he treated every question with contempt, or evaded it with a fabricated story’. When interrogated by the Lord Mayor, he displayed ‘great self possession’ and was again evasive. Subsequent investigations revealed that his father was a thief and former transportee and his mother a prostitute who sold their son ‘by the night’ to burglars ‘for whose service he was highly educated’. He was able to climb ‘to the highest perfection’ and was sufficiently small and flexible to enter a cat-sized hole. Criminals would cut a hole for him to climb through, either to enable their entry to the victim’s premises or else he would hand them the goods.¹⁴⁴

Cases such as this were especially newsworthy because they had become the *leitmotif* for social malaise, part of a periodic fear about the declining morals of the nation.¹⁴⁵ A commentator in 1832 complained that the objective of delinquent children ‘is to follow up

¹⁴² Ibid., pp 78-9.

¹⁴³ Cited by G Pearson, *Hooligan. A History of Respectable Fears* (Houndsmills: Macmillan, 1983), p 119.

¹⁴⁴ *Times* 14 December 1821.

¹⁴⁵ Horn, *Young Offenders*, p 4.

a determined warfare against the constituted authorities by living in idleness and on plunder'.¹⁴⁶ However the press, in common with other contemporary commentators, tended to report on children who committed the most serious crimes, creating thereby a stereotype of the youthful offender as a violent criminal, hardened and precocious. In reality, the average juvenile offender did not fall into this category.¹⁴⁷

Were newspapers accurate in their representation of escalating juvenile delinquency? Commentators attributed the rise to the social and economic stresses brought about by rapid industrialisation, urbanisation and the decline in apprenticeship. This explanation has been accepted by some historians such as Tobias. However the period also saw a greater willingness to prosecute this age group. It was easier to do so because of the development of stipendiary magistrates and more efficient policing, and legislation also made it cheaper to do so. Only a small increase in the proportion of victims willing to prosecute, and a similar increase in the numbers convicted would nevertheless be sufficient to produce large increases in recorded crime.¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, by the early nineteenth century there was a greater willingness to formally prosecute rather than resort to informal sanctions. Thus a contemporary, asked in 1816 whether young delinquents 'have been very much augmented of late years', replied that

I am inclined to think not so much as is generally supposed. I apprehend they are more known from being more investigated.¹⁴⁹

A magistrate in 1828 stated

I remember in former days persons were taken and pumped upon, or something of that sort, but now they are handed over to the police and tried on it, and that tends very much to the increase of crime, because many of them are juvenile offenders.¹⁵⁰

The greater propensity to prosecute probably reflects public anxiety about crime following the 1815 declaration of peace, when Londoners expected large numbers of young men discharged from the armed services to be unemployed and open to criminal suggestion. The Committee for Investigating the Alarming Increase of Juvenile Delinquency in the

¹⁴⁶ Magarey, *'Invention'*, 11.

¹⁴⁷ Shore, *Dodgers*, p 55.

¹⁴⁸ P King, 'The Rise of Juvenile Delinquency in England, 1780-1840: Changing Patterns of Perception and Prosecution', in P King, *Crime and Law in England, 1750-1840. Remaking justice from the margins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp 73-113 (p 101).

¹⁴⁹ P King, 'The Origins of "The Problem of Juvenile Delinquency": the Growth of Juvenile Prosecutions in London in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth centuries', *Criminal Justice History* 14 (1993), 17-41 (36).

¹⁵⁰ King, 'Rise', pp 108-9.

Metropolis in 1815 was alarmed that 'some thousands of boys in the metropolis were daily engaged in the commission of crime' and that 'alarming depravity' was 'hourly extending its influence over the youth of the poor'.¹⁵¹ The increase in prosecutions for 'hustling' probably reflects the 1808 legislation that made pickpocketing no longer a capital offence. However a principal reason for the increased propensity to prosecute appears to have been a changing public discourse about the nature of juvenile offending, generated in part by the press carrying headlines about 'juvenile delinquents' and commentary on the 'great increase of crime, especially among the juvenile'.¹⁵²

Public anxiety also reflected an emerging disjunction between middle and upper class concepts of childhood, and conventional working class practice. Criminal juveniles were almost always identified in the press as belonging to the poorer classes. For the propertied, childhood was becoming a privileged time where it was necessary to protect the young from the painful realities of life. The children of the poor were relatively free from the hierarchical relationships of the more privileged classes, and consequently the street-based lives and sub-culture of working class young people was perceived as idle and dissolute and prone to crime.¹⁵³ Thus, as Peter King has stated, the 'problem' of juvenile offending at this time

appears to have been more a creation of those who reacted to, investigated, or wrote about crime than a reflection of any substantial change in the nature or level of criminal activity amongst the young.¹⁵⁴

However, juvenile offending was only one ingredient in the broader mix of anxieties and panics about crime that appeared in the newspapers of the early nineteenth century. Contemporaries were also worried about the existence of gangs and a criminal underworld.

Gangs and the Emergence of a 'Criminal Underworld'

Newspapers regularly carried stories about street robbers and burglars acting individually or in pairs. But even more worrying for contemporary readers were accounts of crimes, frequently written in inflammatory language, committed by gangs. In the winter of 1816, under the heading 'STREET ROBBERS', one paper reported that there were now 'three gangs of street robbers parading the streets of London in day time. One was led by Bob [B?]arney, another in the City by Tit Shields and the third by Samuel Monday, 'a black man',

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.* pp 103-4.

¹⁵² *London Chronicle* 20 June 1821.

¹⁵³ King, 'Rise', p 107.

¹⁵⁴ King, 'Origins', 35.

whose patch was west of Temple Bar. The latter had recently been apprehended, and the paper reported that it was clear from his examination that he and his gang were responsible for many robberies 'in the neighbourhood of Leicester Square, Sydney's Alley&c'.¹⁵⁵ Many of the gangs were represented in ways that made them appear professional, organised criminals who were making a good living out of crime. Gangs were also described as possessing a capacity for violence that was possibly greater than that shown by individual thieves. In October 1816 newspapers graphically highlighted the activities of 'THE DESPERATE GANG OF ROBBERS IN ESSEX'. The gang had been apprehended following the failed burglary of Mr James Dennis of Tye Green. Dennis had been shot in the face, although his life was not endangered as his man servant had 'vociferated menaces' against them and they were forced to leave 'without obtaining any booty, although it was pretty well known that Mr Dennis had a round sum of money in his house'.

A certain Monck and brothers William and Henry Clark were arrested: Monck gave king's evidence and more arrests were made. Many of the suspects were related including William and Henry's father, Joseph Clark and their brother Joshua: even their mother had been involved as an 'artist' disguising the robbers' faces, and providing tots of gin. The charges against them were numerous. They had 'long been the terror of the neighbourhood' as poachers and sheep stealers. Mr Stock's home was burgled; Mr Mumford and Mr Barnard testified to the loss of their sheep and Mr Shotter claimed he had had nine gallons of wine stolen.¹⁵⁶ Clearly the newspaper attempted, probably unjustly, to associate random, apparently unlinked crimes with this gang. This touched upon many of the themes which were sensitive to contemporary minds: the existence of groups of individuals responsible for widespread, often violent, crimes and offenders perhaps related to each other and operating with organisation and professionalism.

Thus in December 1828 the *Observer* reported the break-up of a major gang of burglars in Berkshire with the arrest of five of its members, three men and two women. In Mortimer they had, the paper alleged, been the 'terror' of the neighbourhood, having taken a house in an isolated location from where they went out at night to commit burglaries. They were equipped with a cart containing housebreaking tools 'of every description', including loaded pistols. 'Too often [they] returned loaded with plunder' the newspaper opined; they even robbed churches. Between 'twenty to thirty respectable farmers' successfully

¹⁵⁵ *Morning Chronicle* 23 November 1816.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 16 October 1816.

identified their property, which included saddles, harnesses and a collection of chimney ornaments. The *Observer* claimed that justices' examinations 'left no doubt of their belonging to the gang who have infested that part of the country for some months past, and committed numerous burglaries and robberies'.¹⁵⁷

When John James and Richard Ryan were taken up and examined about a number of burglaries in September 1828, the newspaper alleged that they were 'part of a gang of daring housebreakers who have for several weeks committed many burglaries in Westminster', including the home of artist Edward Clint and the premises of Messrs Findlater and Pugh, coal merchants. Pre-judging the case, the *Morning Chronicle* suggested that James 'has all the exterior character of a *Filch*'. This was confirmed by the appearance of Ross, clerk to Mr Henry Witham Esq, barrister, who reported that his master's chambers had been broken into, and successfully identified the coat and waistcoat James wore as his own that had gone missing during the burglary.¹⁵⁸

Court records suggest that there were skilled criminals, especially burglars, who operated in groups, armed with specialist tools who planned their crimes with some skill, and rescued each other in times of danger.¹⁵⁹ Many may have been regular offenders, and there is some evidence to suggest that certain families were open to criminal activity, and that peer-group 'gangs' of young men roamed the streets of the capital, supported by a network of 'flash houses', receivers, lodging houses and whole neighbourhoods fuelled by poverty. However, the notion of the existence of 'gangs' is undoubtedly exaggerated press reporting. Morgan and Rushton have argued for the existence of three categories of criminal organisation: networks, groups and gangs. 'Networks' were comprised of individuals such as a thief or a receiver who would occasionally associate with others; 'groups' were men (and sometimes women) who would get together to commit a specific crime, but did not usually cooperate. A 'gang' implied a group with a degree of professional organisation, permanent and formal, operating for long periods of time with certain individuals carrying out specific roles.¹⁶⁰ However, the term 'gang' was used somewhat promiscuously by newspapers, and many of the 'gangs' referred to in press accounts were more likely to have been groups or networks. The category was self-fulfilling: when an offender was finally arrested his best strategy was to name as many former colleagues as

¹⁵⁷ *Observer* 8 December 1828.

¹⁵⁸ *Morning Chronicle* 20 September 1828.

¹⁵⁹ Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, pp 163ff.

¹⁶⁰ G Morgan and P Rushton, *Rogues, thieves and the rule of law: the problem of crime in north-east England, 1718-1800* (London: UCL Press, 1998), pp 85-95.

possible in the hope of becoming chief evidence for the prosecution rather than the prime suspect.¹⁶¹

As well as direct attribution the press had subtle ways of suggesting the existence of gangs of prolific burglars and street robbers. One means was to ascribe unsolved crimes to the work of gangs without offering any supporting evidence, merely conjecture and speculation. This exaggerated risk and emphasised danger to the newspaper reader. On the night of 3 September 1828 the booking office at the Bull and Mouth Inn was broken into and stamps valued at £6000 were stolen; this figure was later inflated to 'nearly £7000'. (A further £25,000 was allegedly left behind because a broken gas pipe had nearly suffocated the burglars). The paper speculated that somebody with direct experience of the office 'must' have assisted and, because of the ways in which the parcels had been selected 'and from other circumstances' 'there appears no doubt that the robbery was planned and executed by that gang who have so long and so successfully carried on depredations of a similar crime'. The paper alleged that this is the work 'of that small remnant of the Turley gang, still about the metropolis, who, it is well known vowed vengeance against parcels of all kinds upon the decision on the fate of their leader, and who have seldom failed to enlist amongst them some person who is well acquainted with the premises against which they entertain any design'.¹⁶² What started as a simple description became a supposition and then a direct attribution of blame, without offering any substantive evidence other than speculation.

The press would also link two or more robberies together and suggest they were the work of the same gang, without offering any objective reason for that conjecture. In December 1816, William Unwin was charged with being part of a gang of three highwaymen who had knocked down W Running and taken six pence from him. John Foster also reported that he had been knocked down and robbed near the Pantheon by three or four gentleman's servants, alleging that one of the men had stood on his throat whilst another held a cloth over his eyes and mouth and the third ripped his clothes and took four shillings. Despite there being no similarities between the two robberies, the journal hypothesised that they were 'committed by a gang which somewhat resembles the foregoing'.¹⁶³ Even if the group of robbers was the same, there is no evidence that there was any degree of organisation,

¹⁶¹ P King, 'Newspaper reporting, prosecution practice and perceptions of urban crime: the Colchester crime wave of 1765', *Continuity and Change* 2 (3), (1987), 423-454 (436).

¹⁶² *Observer* 15 September 1828.

¹⁶³ *Times* 6 December 1816.

commitment to membership or an established *modus operandi* in carrying out the robberies.

Newspapers also chose to mention prior convictions or suspicions about the criminality of certain individuals to suggest that they were 'career criminals', once again exaggerating danger. This might include circumstantial 'evidence' or the suspect's perceived physical likeness or character. This may have been given by a police officer and left unchallenged as 'fact'. Above all, the press reported examinations by justices of the peace in great detail, presenting the evidence against the prisoner without any qualification as an established fact. Newspapers gave little space for the prisoner's own defence, and represented magistrate's examinations in the style of a trial report. This representation nearly always presumed guilt yet there had been no legal judgement, and the subsequent trial was often not reported, especially if there was a not guilty verdict.

For example, George Thompson *alias* Nut was examined by magistrates with his accomplice Henry Penny *alias* Webster and George Porter, for the burglary of the home of GF Young Esq in Church Row. Mr Miller, the chief officer, stated that he knew them all as 'thieves on the Surrey side'. It was claimed that Porter had been 'tried and cast for death' for a robbery in a publican's house, and that he had *probably* robbed his father's house. Penny was equally as damned, by his associations and police suspicions. Len, a police officer, stated that 'there was the strongest reason, though no positive proof' that Penny was one of the gang because he looked like one of the burglars that escaped that night. There were also other unstated circumstances 'which scarcely left a doubt of it': the suspect had run away from the Black Hole public house when he saw Len and another officer enter the premises which were, allegedly, the 'rendezvous of the worst characters in London [and] is the house in which Thompson resided'. When he was arrested Penny gave the false name of Webster, 'but besides this (the newspaper added) there was another fact that looked suspicious – he had on him a new hat [...] and the person who had escaped from the watchman had left his behind him'. Bow Street officer Dawson also recognised Penny as an 'old thief' who had previously been in custody under a different name. Having besmirched the characters of Penny and Porter, the newspaper reported that the magistrate could find no evidence against them. Special attention was given to Thompson whose real name, it was claimed, was Nut, a 'celebrity [...] housebreaker'; the paper expected that 'several other charges' *could* be made against him and speculated that he might be persuaded to reveal the identity of his accomplices.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ *Times* 8 October 1828

Clearly the newspaper was giving totally uncritical coverage of the testimonies of police officers leaving no doubt about the criminality of these three men even though the evidence was highly circumstantial, and in the end no charges were made against two of the suspects.

Similarly John Evans, described by the press as ‘a notorious character’ was apprehended in Montgomeryshire where he had assumed the identity of ‘Squire Smallman’ who at the time of his arrest had more than £200 on him. A police officer discovered stolen property at Evan’s parents’ home, but the press exaggerated this into the claim that Evans ‘is supposed to have been concerned in [robb]eries innumerable. A person, near Ross, was some time since robbed of 1,000 sovereigns, in gold, and suspicion points at Evans as the robber’.¹⁶⁵ Allegations such as these helped to maintain a narrative of authority in the press, showing the necessity of ever more effective policing and authority over crime and disorder.

Press portrayals of a criminal underworld

The press further developed its notions about the prevalence of gangs into ideas of an ‘underworld’ ruled by a criminal class. Although the term ‘criminal class’ was at its most common later in the century, the notion of individuals living solely off the proceeds of crime is an old one, but it is clearly argued in the early nineteenth century newspapers that it is some new phenomenon.¹⁶⁶ By 1864, The *Times* could claim that concepts about an underworld were now fanciful: modern policing had rescued the country from the villains of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.¹⁶⁷ Literary representations have been taken at face value by popular historians and some scholars, most noticeably J J Tobias. Whilst there were individuals in early nineteenth century England who made a living solely or predominantly from offending, it is an exaggeration to inflate this into a full – blown class or underworld.

Dick Hobbs has linked organised crime and a criminal class with urbanisation, especially in London, where the capitalist economy was most advanced and ‘the market place was so

¹⁶⁵ *Observer* 22 December 1828.

¹⁶⁶ Emsley, *Crime and Society*, p 177.

¹⁶⁷ Shore, *Underworlds*, p4. Also during the 1860s, WH Watts wrote, ‘There are *now* no professional highwaymen; there are no professional burglars; [...] there are *now* [...] no burglars or highwaymen who support existence solely by following out their penal trade’ (emphases added). Cited by Emsley, *Crime and Society*, p 180.

affluent [...] and regimentation of the emerging working class was most ineffective'.¹⁶⁸

Randall McGowen has helpfully identified the principal characteristics perceived as pertinent to the concept of a criminal class as follows:

- The criminal class was highly organised;
- There was a degree of division of labour amongst offenders;
- They were professional;
- Crime was taught and learnt;
- There was a network of criminals and persons willing to re-sell items illegally;
- They were hardened and disliked honest labour;
- They were below the lowest class;
- They knew no moral duty or religion.¹⁶⁹

There were undoubtedly some highly skilled criminals, especially burglars, who deliberately set out to rob houses, armed and equipped, having undertaken planning and precautions and they may have been frequent offenders. There is also evidence to suggest that certain families were more prone to crime than others, and that peer-group collectives of young men roamed the capital's streets looking for trouble.¹⁷⁰ They were further supported by networks of flash houses, lodging houses, specialist language ('cant') and whole neighbourhoods characterised by poverty and crime. Newspapers confirmed their existence in the public's mind, but in reality their claims were frequently over – blown and had little foundation. For example, the press attempted to present burglary as a highly skilled activity carried out by professionals armed with specialist tools. But such equipment was usually an everyday item used by workmen in their normal employment.¹⁷¹ Just as 'gangs' were simply groups or loose networks of individuals, so an 'underworld' or 'class' was also largely a notion developed in newspapers and periodicals. The use of terms such as 'gang', 'professional' or 'class' by newspapers as well as by law enforcement agencies, tended to confer authority and legitimacy on the notion of systematic and collectively organised criminality. Policing improvements, and therefore detection, may also have

¹⁶⁸ D Hobbs, 'Professional and Organised Crime in Britain', in M Maguire, R Morgan and R Reiner (eds), *The Oxford Book of Criminology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp 441-68 (p 444).

¹⁶⁹ R McGowen, 'Getting to Know the Criminal Class in Nineteenth-Century England', *Nineteenth Century Contexts* 14 (1), (1990), 33-54 (35-38).

¹⁷⁰ Shore, *Underworlds*, ch 4 *passim*.

¹⁷¹ Gray, *Crime, Policing and Punishment*, p 101.

fuelled ideas about professional criminal, enhanced by authors like Charles Dickens.¹⁷²

In order to support the underworld thesis certain districts were associated by the press with criminality in early nineteenth century London. These included the area around Tothill, Orchard and Pye Streets in Westminster (collectively known as 'Devil's Acre'), St Giles rookery, Saffron Hill and Field Lane, parts of Whitecross Street, Golden Lane and Grub Street, Whitechapel, Shoreditch, Spitalfields, and Bethnal Green, Shadwell, Wrapping and parts of the Borough.¹⁷³ Such streets were characterised by poverty, high mobility and Irish and Jewish immigration as well as brothels, low lodging houses and disreputable public houses.¹⁷⁴ The labelling of certain neighbourhoods by the press was self-fulfilling: the respectable avoided living there because of their reputation and the damage it could cause to job prospects, whilst criminals opted to live in such a district because of the apparent safety of a 'closed' supportive community. However, the apparent geographical origins of London crime was not always obvious from newspapers since crime reports did not routinely provide offenders' birthplace or home address; but they did label such districts as 'criminal' in commentaries. However the press generated fears of an immoral and ungovernable class. It portrayed the 'underworld' as a separate society detached from the respectable world and marked by networks, cant language and secret codes.¹⁷⁵ This was both a reassuring and frightening, if ultimately false, representation of criminality for middle class and elite readers of newspapers. The accounts gave readers a feeling of superiority over criminals, as well as helping readers to feel that they were not in any sense responsible or accountable for members of that class.¹⁷⁶ The concept of a criminal class expressed in newsprint confirmed that crime was committed by a deviant group on respectable law abiding members of society.¹⁷⁷ In reality, representations of a criminal class or underworld in the press are more like reflections of survival and street culture by the poorest classes projected into the fears and anxieties of middle and elite class readers. As Michelle Perrot has written

There are no 'facts of crime as such, only a judgemental process that

¹⁷² H Shore, 'Cross Covers, Buzzers and General Sorts of Prigs': Juvenile Crime and the Criminal "Underworld" in the Early Nineteenth Century', *British Journal of Criminology* 39 (10 (1999), 10-24 (10).

¹⁷³ H Shore, 'Mean Streets, Criminality, Immorality and the Street in Early Nineteenth Century London', in T Hitchcock and H Shore (eds), *The Streets of London From the Great Fire to the Great Stink* (London: Rivers Oram, 2003), pp 151-164 (p 153).

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p 154.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p 155.

¹⁷⁶ Emsley, *Crime and Society*, p 185.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p 183.

institutes crimes by designating as criminal both certain acts and their perpetrators. In other words, there is a discourse of crime that reveals the obsessions of a society.¹⁷⁸

The press and the creation of narratives

The impact of rapid social, economic and political change on the propertied was considerable. Not only had they seen the effects of revolutionary political ideas on the French elite, ripples of discontent had spread across the Channel to England. To Edmund Burke and the government, the egalitarian principles and violence of the Revolution were 'demonic' and ultimately led to despotism.¹⁷⁹ Furthermore, urbanisation and industrialisation, especially in London, the North and Midlands threatened further social and economic dangers to the established social and political order. In this period, crime became the repository of fears about such social change.¹⁸⁰ 'Crime' was coming to be thought of less as personal depravity (as it had been in earlier periods) than as 'a necessary and potentially uncontrollable effect of social change' that threatened social and political hierarchies.¹⁸¹ Patrick Colquhoun, magistrate, author and advocate of police reform also used the French Revolution to justify his demands for improved policing, and linked the criminal class with the violence of revolution.¹⁸² And it was the poorest classes that bore the brunt of this anxiety. Thus Colquhoun blamed the 'depraved habits and loose conduct of a great proportion of the lower classes' for the large amount of crime in the capital. He also linked offending to unparalleled social change: urbanisation gave 'refuge [...] to villainy, in means of concealment, and of subsisting in secrecy', emphasising 'the enlarged state of Society, the vast extent of moving property, and the unexampled growth of the Metropolis'.¹⁸³ The unrespectable poor, including the unemployed, became merged with the criminal 'class', so that by 1818 a select committee could classify 'that class of persons who ordinarily commit crime, meaning the poor and indigent'.¹⁸⁴ Fears were further inflamed by the publication from 1810 onwards of national indictment statistics dating back to 1805, which purported to show that crime was increasing rapidly. The newspaper

¹⁷⁸ Cited by Weiner, *Reconstructing the Criminal*, p7.

¹⁷⁹ Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People? England 1783-1846* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), pp 58-9.

¹⁸⁰ VAC Gatrell, 'Crime, authority and the policeman state', in FML Thompson (ed), *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750-1950, vol. 3 Social Agencies and Institutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp 243-310 (p 244).

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p 248.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p 249.

¹⁸³ P Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis* (London: 1796).

¹⁸⁴ *Select Committee on the State of the Police of the Metropolis*, 3rd Report, PP 1818, VIII, p 34.

press provided further evidence to this effect. Social discipline was collapsing with the breakdown of a face-to-face society, the declining role of the small workshop as new factories sprang up and the estrangement of rich from poor.¹⁸⁵ The supposed consequences of these changes could be read in the crime reports of the newspaper. Thus there was a perceived need to reform and discipline a large part of the working class whose culture was felt to be increasingly degenerate. A raft of legislation was introduced to control vagrancy and improve policing (culminating in the creation of the Metropolitan Police in 1829) and discipline was greater against the poor and the workshy.¹⁸⁶ As Gatrell has stated

This was part of a mounting disciplinary assault on those mainly proletarian classes who were assumed to threaten dominant and newly articulated definitions of order: those reluctant to enter a disciplined labour force, for example, or those who were excluded from, or dissented from, the consensual society which the political nation was beginning to try to construct.¹⁸⁷

Throughout this period, as well as in modern times, the nature of crime reporting – presenting crime as an ever present threat heightened public anxieties about offending, and encouraged hard line policies by magistracy and government to meet the criminal danger.¹⁸⁸

The state began to take greater and greater control of the criminal justice system, and created what Gatrell has called a ‘policemen – state’ ensuring that ‘crime came to be seen as a social ‘problem’ requiring ‘solutions’ that only experts and the state could provide.¹⁸⁹ This perception was a new one needing moral and ideological justification. Bureaucratic, formal and coordinated policing developed at this time partly because crime came to be seen as more than personal depravity, but as an aggregate, an urgent dilemma requiring speedy resolution. The press, through its repetitive reporting of serious crimes, often appearing unsolved, had helped to generate a perception that ‘crime’ was escalating and out of control, and ‘that something needed to be done’ about it. This stimulated a ‘law and order’ debate with the reading public, and was one important element in providing the justification for more efficient law enforcement, culminating in the creation of the Metropolitan Police in 1829.

¹⁸⁵ M Ignatieff, *A Just Measure of Pain. The Penitentiary in the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1850* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p 156.

¹⁸⁶ Gatrell, ‘Crime, authority and policeman – state’, p 250.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p 244.

¹⁸⁸ Richard M Ward, *Print Culture, Crime and Justice in 18th-Century London* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

¹⁸⁹ Gatrell, ‘Crime, authority and the policeman – state’, p 244.

However the press went further and helped to create a 'narrative of authority' within its pages, that is, positive support for the activities of those responsible for administering and enforcing the criminal justice system. The *Old Bailey Sessions Papers* had originally served this function; following their collapse, this function was carried out by newspapers. The *Sessions Papers* and the press served the ideological function of maintaining the legal fiction of 'public justice': showing the public that justice was being done, thereby legitimising the power of the authorities to punish.¹⁹⁰

First, newspapers helped justify the need for authority structures run by the middle and elite classes by helping to create a climate of anxiety through its repetitive and selective crime reportage. The press further stressed the vulnerability of the bourgeoisie to violation and violence, not only in public but in their own homes and businesses. Their attackers were perceived collectively as the poorest in society and even members of a criminal 'underworld', cruelly parodying the bourgeois respectable society with its order, hierarchy and professionalism. The press provided the middle classes with the 'evidence' they needed that they were culturally and morally different from the urban poor of London, who needed control by state agencies to bring them into line with respectable virtues.

Second, the press provided the vital evidence that the authorities were doing all in their power to stop the unprecedented tide of criminal activity. Although the press would occasionally censor the behaviour of police officers, on the whole newspaper described the activities of the police approvingly, expressing the conviction that perpetrators of robberies and burglaries would be brought to justice. When facing difficulties finding the culprits responsible for robbing the Warrington household in 1828. The *Times* reassured its readers that a female servant had been secured, 'and Bishop, and the rest of the officers engaged in the affair, are indefatigable in their exertions to bring the offenders to justice'.¹⁹¹ Similarly when the discovery of the offenders who robbed the Savoy public house was proving elusive, officer Faxan, it was stated, would 'use every exertion to endeavour to discover the perpetrators of a robbery so daring and extensive'.¹⁹² Furthermore, the papers showed that the police often did arrest criminals successfully. When an 'officer of rank' in the army was violently assaulted and robbed by Peter Flannaghan and James McCowley in Bloomsbury in November 1816, he gave in his written testimony to the magistrate 'great

¹⁹⁰ S Devereaux, 'The City and the Sessions Paper: "Public Justice" in London, 1770-1800', *Journal of British Studies* 35 (4), (1996), 466-503.

¹⁹¹ *Times* 3 December 1828.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

credit to the watchman for their promptitude in securing the prisoners'.¹⁹³ The arrest of the four men who burgled Mrs Ashworth's home in Berners Street was only achieved 'after many weeks [of] laborious investigation' by the police'.¹⁹⁴ And the vigilance of Porter, a watchman, ensured the security of the home of 'eminent surgeon' Mr Carpue in Dean Street and the capture of Edward Lawler who had tried to break into it.¹⁹⁵ The press often sought to 'humanise' criminal justice by naming individual police officers: they were rarely referred to in abstract terms like 'police', and magistrates and judges were also frequently identified the same way.

Newspapers educated readers as to the operation of the criminal law through reporting trials, especially those heard at the Old Bailey. Although there was a marked tendency to describe only trials with a guilty verdict and minimise the role of the defence, they were always shown as operating within the strict boundaries of the law. Hustling, for example, it was expressly stated, was not to become legally confused with highway robbery. Judges were invariably described in complementary terms for being 'learned' or 'wise'. All citizens were seen to be treated equally before the law and judicial decision making although personal was not arbitrary. The role of the jury was emphasised. At the Old Bailey trial of George Wells, William Smith and William Quinian for the extensive burglary of the home of Charles Cholmley Esq, Mr Baron Richardson was most careful in his summing up to the jury:

He observed that however unfortunate it might be for the prisoners at the bar he was afraid no rational doubt could exist respecting their being concerned in this nefarious transaction. Should the Jury find the burglary doubtful, they might acquit the prisoners of that part of the charge; but he believed it impossible to acquit them on the second count. They would, however, exercise their own judgement; and he had no doubt that their verdict would be founded in the strictest justice.¹⁹⁶

Thus the decisions of the courts were usually accepted uncritically by newspapers.

Newspapers also showed the operation of the law not only through accounts of trials, but also by reporting in detail the thorough examinations of suspects, victims and witnesses.

¹⁹³ *Morning Chronicle* 7 November 1816.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 18 November 1816

¹⁹⁵ *Times* 28 December 1821.

¹⁹⁶ *Morning Chronicle* 7 December 1816.

These were trial – like interrogations, often making the prisoner appear guilty and the magistrate as a wise and impartial law enforcer. Press accounts show the justices’ skills in questioning and their decisive actions in bringing offenders to justice. However, the press was reassuring that a suspect would be treated fairly and justly. When ‘a Gentleman’ complained that he had been robbed of bank notes valued at £26, the notes were supposedly found upon John Butler, who claimed to have found them. The gentleman claimed that the notes had certain names and identifying marks upon them, but the magistrate examined them ‘privately, to prevent any would – be owner getting possession of them’, and he failed to find any of the gentleman’s identification valid.¹⁹⁷ Extensive coverage was given in the press to the robbery at the Warrington household, including the examination of suspects by Sir Richard Birnie, who was shown to be scrupulously fair. In December 1828, two further suspects were brought before the magistrate and [underwent a long private examination’ but, ‘[n]o circumstance, however, was elicited to warrant their further detention, and they were accordingly discharged’.¹⁹⁸

Was this function of the press to provide a ‘public justice’ service and a ‘narrative of authority’ entirely new or did it have precedents? In the mid-eighteenth century Henry Fielding, chief magistrate at Bow Street and sometime journalist, certainly attempted to use the press generally, and newspapers in particular, in the service of the government to favour a ‘law and order’ dialogue and further his own career. For example, he represented his own skills as an able examiner of suspects and ability to detect offenders.¹⁹⁹ This too was at a time when a conservative ideology of crime prevailed: where a middling and elite class sought to distance itself from the metropolitan poor and attribute crime to that lower class. But how does press representation of robbery and burglary change between the 1780s and the early nineteenth century?

Changes in crime reportage

Although newspapers retained the same physical layout and structure in the early nineteenth- century that they had had in the late eighteenth- century, there were some important differences in the reporting of street robberies and burglaries. This difference

¹⁹⁷ *Morning Chronicle* 16 December 1816.

¹⁹⁸ *Times* 3 December 1828.

¹⁹⁹ D Lemmings, ‘Henry Fielding, Moralist, Justice and Journalist: Narratives of Panic, Authority and Emotion in English Crime and Justice Reportage, 1748-52’ (forthcoming article in *Huntington Library Quarterly*). I am grateful to Professor Lemmings for allowing me to see his pre-publication paper.

was not limited to the elimination of traditional highway robbery. One most obvious change was the decline of plagiarism. In the 1780s sample many newspapers carried accounts of the same crime, often in such near identical language that it is clear that they unashamedly copied from one another. In the early nineteenth-century sample, individual titles carried a more varied number of stories, and where accounts were provided of the same crime, the language usually varied considerably showing that direct copying had not taken place. This reflects perhaps a greater professionalism on the part of journalists. Not only were there probably more writers employed by newspapers, they were better educated too. In 1810, twenty three people were employed reporting parliamentary debates for the press, of whom eighteen had had a university education.²⁰⁰ However there was a numerical decline in press reportage of thefts in the early nineteenth century compared to the 1780s. Whereas there were 232 descriptions of highway robberies and 359 street robberies in the earlier sample, there were only 146 accounts of street robbery in the early 1800s sample, a notable decline in reporting this crime. However, with stories about house theft there were 106 stories about breaking and entering offences in the 1780s whereas there were a comparable 155 in the early nineteenth century sample. This is an increase of 49 burglary and housebreaking newspaper reports in absolute numbers, and so these crimes have become much more significant crime especially because there

Table 4.8

Old Bailey Guilty Verdicts for Highway Robbery and Burglary: A Comparative Table, 1780, 1785, 1790; 1816, 1821, 1828

Date	Robbery	Burglary
Aug-Dec 1780	8	9
Aug-Dec 1785	16	29
Aug-Dec 1790	9	20
Aug-Dec 1816	23	52
Aug-Dec 1821	11	20
Aug-Dec 1828	14	36

Source: OBSP

²⁰⁰ A Aspinall, 'The Social Status of Journalists at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century', *The Review of English Studies*, XXI, (1945), 216-232 (230).

were fewer street robberies in the later sample. This is also reflected in the number of burglary incidents reported upon. The early nineteenth century sample covered 203 incidents, whereas in the 1780s only 132 cases were reported upon in total.

Does this change in the respective proportions of robberies and burglaries reflect a change in the nature of offending or does it show different editorial priorities? Since we lack any self – report studies or internal documentation relating to press policies and the ‘dark figure’ of unknown crimes remains problematic, it is difficult to be definitive. However, the figures of guilty verdicts at the Old Bailey suggest that burglary and housebreaking were becoming more ‘popular’ forms of offending, yet street robbery was nevertheless increasing. Table 4.8 shows that whilst there were only 58 guilty verdicts for burglary and housebreaking in the sample months and years for the 1780s, the figure almost doubled to 108 in the early nineteenth- century sample. Likewise street robbery guilty verdicts increased from 33 to 48. Clearly, newspaper editors had a greater number of burglary cases to select from in the early nineteenth- century than they had had in the 1780s. Furthermore there were consistently more burglaries and housebreaking prosecutions at the Old Bailey than there were for street robbery, but this may be accounted for by the relative ease of prosecuting burglaries compared to the difficulties of detecting street robbers. (Burglaries often took longer to commit and usually involved more than one person, and due to greater personal losses, victims may have been more willing to prosecute, so it may have been an easier offence to take to court). The figures do suggest, however, that burglary was increasing in real terms, and that the prioritisation of burglary reports by editors was a part a reflection of this. Perhaps the decline of traditional highway robbery meant that robbery was now less newsworthy. However; ‘hustling’ became an important ‘theme in newspaper reportage about street robbery. Thus burglary and hustling had become increasingly newsworthy and both crimes were prioritised by editors by dedicating more column space to them. (See Table 4.9)

**Table 4.9 Column Space in Victim Reports about Highway Robbery and Burglary:
A Comparative Table, 1780s/Early 19th century**

a) Highway Robbery

Years	Few lines	Under ¼ col	Over ¼ col	Up to ½ col	Over ½ col	Total
1780, 1785, 1790 Aug-Dec	41%	23%	12%	16%	8%	100%
1816, 1821, 1828, Aug-Dec	38%	31%	15%	14%	2%	100%

b) Burglary

Years	Few lines	Under ¼ col	Over ¼ col	Up to ½ col	Over ½ col	Total
1780, 1785, 1790 Aug-Dec	31%	26%	18%	17%	8%	100%
1816, 1821, 1828, Aug-Dec	18%	20%	21%	26%	15%	100%

Source: *Times; Observer; Examiner; Globe; Morning Chronicle*; Aug-Dec. 1816, 1821, 1828

The attractiveness of burglary as a newsworthy crime is further indicated by contrasting the amount of column space dedicated to burglary and street robbery. Table 10 shows that burglary accounts had increased in size by the early nineteenth century. Whereas in the earlier period 8% of accounts were of the longest length, over ½ column, this had increased to 23% by the early 1800s. Meanwhile the shortest accounts (only a few lines long) had declined from one third of stories to 18%. Correspondingly, robbery reports got shorter with the longest accounts declining from a maximum of 8% in the 1780s to a minimum of 2% in the early 1800s. Clearly to some extent burglary was replacing street robbery in editorial preference, especially if it involved juvenile offenders.

Reportage was also favouring examinations by magistrates and trial accounts over victim reports. Interrogations had formed a relatively small part of coverage of robberies and burglaries in the 1780s, but by the early nineteenth century they comprised well over one third of all reports for both offences (37% for street robbery and 36% for burglary. In the 1780s sample the figures had been 23% and 18% respectively, but these were invariably brief mentions without much detail provided). Similarly trials were proportionately under-reported in the 1780s, and when they were, they were described with a minimum amount of factual content. Trial descriptions account for 27% of reportage accounts for street robbery and 40% for burglary in the 1800s sample, compared to 5% and 19% in the 1780s. The smaller number of examinations in the 1780s can be accounted for by the Attorney

General banning these reports at this time.²⁰¹ These, together with trial reports, make up the majority of newspaper coverage of burglary and robbery stories in the early nineteenth century, not victim reports which comprise only one third of accounts of robberies and only 23% of burglaries. Interrogations and trial accounts contained much more detail and were therefore much longer – hence the general increase in length of many reports. However this aided the presentation of a narrative of authority by the press. These accounts were not uncorroborated stories like victim reports were, and they appeared to carry a semi-official approval. Interrogations, like trial reports, invariably put suspects in a bad light by giving little space for an adequate defence. They also suggest that criminals were being caught and arrested, even though there were few reports of this happening (4% for street robbery and 7% for burglary).

Press reportage gave the impression that certain crimes were becoming slightly less violent. (See Table 4.10.) This is partly due to the increase in burglary accounts, since burglaries were generally less violent affairs that usually had few opportunities for direct confrontation between offender and victim. Also ‘hustling’ was a crime which also had less propensity to the use of excessive force. Whereas in the 1780s over one third (201) of reports for highway and footpad robberies involved serious levels of force against victims, this had reduced to only 17% (25 accounts) in the early nineteenth century sample. Murder and attempted murder rates were comparable: 5% in the 1780s and 6% in the early 1800s, but of course (as with the previous figures) the impact was less because far fewer victims were involved. The declining level of violence and reduction in the apparent number of victims, may have reassured readers that stronger policing and authority were an effective means of subduing street robbery, thus helping to support a narrative of authority.

²⁰¹ JM Beattie, ‘Sir John Fielding and Public Justice: The Bow Street Magistrate’s Court, 1754-1780’, *Law and History Review*, 25 (1), (2007), 61-100 (95).

Table 4.10 Violence Levels in Victim Reports for Highway Robbery and Burglary: A Comparative Table 1780s/Early 19th Century

A) Highway Robbery

Violence level	Aug-Dec 1780, 1785, 1790	Aug-Dec 1816, 1821, 1828
Threat only	18%	24%
Mild violence	34%	37%
Weapons	9%	16%
Serious violence	34%	17%
Murder/attempted murder	5%	6%
TOTAL	100%	100%

B) Burglary

Violence level	Aug-Dec 1780, 1785, 1790	Aug-Dec 1816, 1821, 1828
Threat only	51%	22%
Mild violence	33%	33%
Weapons	10%	19%
Serious violence	6%	20%
Murder/attempted murder	0%	6%
TOTAL	100%	100%

Source: *Times; Observer; Examiner; Globe; Morning Chronicle*; Aug-Dec 1816, 1821, 1828

However the growing numbers of reports of house thefts would have offset this favourable impression to a certain extent. Burglaries were becoming slightly more violent. Although there were around the same numbers of murders and attempted murders, extreme violence was used in one fifth of cases in the early nineteenth century. This would confirm to readers that burglary was a growing serious and pressing problem. Young people appear to have been taking a greater part in robberies and burglaries according to press reports. However this is impossible to substantiate, because ages were very rarely given in newspaper reports in the 1780s. However the addition of age information in the early

nineteenth century suggests that the youthfulness of offenders was becoming a matter of concern to newspaper readers, editors and society at large around this time. According to press reports, around one third of burglars and street robbers were under nineteen years of age. These figures were regarded as worrying by contemporaries, although the 'real' figures for juvenile offending were probably much higher, and contemporaries' perceptions were probably influenced by more than simple number counting from newspapers. Editorial comment exaggerated the role of young offenders compared to their actual numbers appearing in the press. According to newspapers, female involvement in offending was relatively low compared to male offending: only 11% of female offenders involved themselves in street robbery, and even fewer – 6% took part in burglaries. This accords with contemporary gender perceptions where robbery and active roles in burglary were seen as primarily male activities.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that social and economic changes, and political discontent affected not only patterns of offending, but also how crime was perceived by readers of newspapers. Urbanisation influenced the nature of street robbery: highway robbery became extinct whereas hustling grew in importance, so that the press was able to present it, inaccurately, as a new and unique problem. Ideas about the frequency of offending were divided between optimists and pessimists: both obtaining some support from press reportage. Fewer crimes were being reported, but those that were were reported in greater detail, in the form of semi-official accounts of trials and justices' interrogations, which invariable helped to make suspects look guilty, thereby helping to support a narrative of authority. News writers were probably aided by improvements in the criminal justice system which made news gathering easier, and assisted the switch from victim reports to interrogations and trials. Press reports helped to draw readers into the criminal justice system, which also helped to legitimate it.

Although newspapers maintained the same structure, they were becoming more professional. In particular, they developed 'themes' in their crime reportage. These centred upon problems with servants and employees, gangs, juvenile delinquents and a criminal class and underworld. The accounts of crimes were usually exaggerated and helped generate fear and anxiety, especially among the propertied, already fearful due to the French Revolution, urbanisation, industrialisation and radicalism. The state responded by increasing its control over the criminal justice system, in particular through improved

policing. The press arguably assisted the state by bolstering its perception of social crisis by serving a 'public justice function' and helping to generate a 'narrative of authority'. Through its descriptions of offending, newspapers focused upon, and represented, the interests of their middle class readers. Despite the fact that Old Bailey convictions for street robbery were increasing (with the implication that the incidence of this felony was rising), newspaper readers would have had the impression that burglars were more to be feared than street robbers (although hustlers were a problem too). They would have had mixed feelings about what they read about crime and justice issues in the newspapers. On the one hand, they would have been alarmed by the threats to their property and lives by an array of persons: domestic servants, employees, gangs, juvenile delinquents and the existence of an underworld of professional criminals. However they would have also perceived that, compared to the 1780s in particular, government was being more successful in dealing with the problem. Improved effectiveness of policing was shown by the ending of highway robbery, better detection and higher levels of arrests, hence there were more justices' interrogations and trial accounts reported in the press and in greater detail than ever before. These descriptions were semi-official in style and tone, thereby validating contemporary perceptions on crime and justice issues. The press therefore gave contemporaries a very mixed message about the prevalence and problems of serious offending: the middle classes in particular were highly vulnerable, but through its creation of a narrative of authority the press attempted to reassure that particular public that the state could adequately deal with the problem. However, press reports suggested to readers that the battle against burglars was not being won.

The press helped to create criminal 'stereotypes': the professional criminal, the juvenile delinquent, gangs of offenders and problem servants and employees. The earlier dilemma – why did people commit crimes? – was starting to be answered in a new way: individuals broke the law because they were 'criminals', not just as examples of everyman gone wrong. These stereotypes helped the middle class to distance themselves from the criminal and the metropolitan poor alike. This helped to justify greater state control, culminating in the foundation of the Metropolitan Police Force in 1829. Clearly the press had served the authorities and the interests of the middle class reasonably well. Whether newspapers served the function of public justice as well is more open to doubt. Whilst the press gave a great deal of space to reporting crime and justice issues, it did not describe incidents of crime in their totality, nor did it represent all trials or give fairness to suspects when describing justices' interrogations. Newspapers were anxious to not appear critical of

the courts, and to suggest that the criminal justice system was fair. However, given the class bias of the criminal law, the press was also bolstering the security of its largely middle class readers.

Conclusion

The first half of the eighteenth century witnessed a vibrant and flourishing print culture, of which a large part was dedicated to crime and justice issues. It was, according to Richard Ward, a 'golden age' of writing about crime.¹ Publications included pamphlets, Ordinary's *Accounts*, 'last dying speeches' and the Old Bailey *Proceedings* as well as the new literary genre, the newspaper. As Shoemaker has argued, for the first time 'popular understandings of the nature of crime as a social problem were shaped more by what people read than by personal experience and oral reports'.² However, this variety was not to last. From mid-century, the *Accounts* lost their appeal to middling and elite audiences, and the *Proceedings* lost their popular readership too.³ What remained was the newspaper, a publication that was increasing in terms of the number of titles available and total circulation most impressively. Newspapers clearly became the principal source of printed news about crime and justice for many literate people.

This thesis has demonstrated that, although problematic, newspaper reports of robbery and burglary in the period 1780-1830 are a useful resource for the scholar. Although designed as a commercial product and used, primarily perhaps, for entertainment and then discarded, this thesis has suggested that they offer an imaginative and creative understanding of the social realities of offending, and have been overlooked by many historians who have simply used them as a supplementary source of information, or to create micro-studies of individual crimes, such as Andrew and McGowen's analysis of the fascinating forgery case involving the Perreaus twins and Mrs Rudd.⁴ However scholars such as King, Snell and Ward have begun to systematically use content analysis methodologies to produce a statistical understanding of newspaper crime reportage. This has provided many interesting insights into the process of editorial selectivity and what constitutes 'newsworthiness' in a crime story. However this is not, of course, how

¹ RM Ward, *Print Culture, Crime and Justice in Eighteenth-Century London* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p 205.

² R Shoemaker, 'Print Culture and the Creation of Public Knowledge about Crime in Eighteenth-century London', in P Knepper, J Doak, and J Shephard (eds), *Urban Crime Prevention, Surveillance and Restorative Justice. Effects of Social Technologies* (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2009), pp 1-21 (p 1).

³ S Devereaux, 'From Sessions to Newspaper? Criminal Trial Reporting, the Nature of Crime and the London Press, 1770-1800', *The London Journal*, 32 (1), 1-27.

⁴ D Andrew and R McGowen, *The Perreaus and Mrs Rudd. Forgery and Betrayal in Eighteenth-Century London* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2001).

contemporaries would have comprehended these accounts, upon whom language, style, tone and presentation would have had the greatest impact, and, therefore the qualitative dimension is an all-important factor in content analysis research if we are to understand the likely effect these reports had at the time upon readers. The qualitative factor was a key element of this thesis. In the historiography of crime and justice, there is now '[a] shift away from considering the history of crime and deviance as phenomena to be encountered through collective or abstract conceptual study' towards an enhancement of individual stories.⁵ Newspaper narratives help us to understand the preoccupations of past societies, and, as GR Elton has written 'test [...] some of the generalisations that we necessarily apply to historical writing and of correcting misconceptions only too likely to occur when history becomes divorced from knowledge of detail'.⁶ How these stories are constructed and presented is, of course, crucial to our understanding of these stories.

In the light of this, the extensive research of Beattie and King (perhaps the two foremost historians of crime and justice in the later eighteenth century) can be seen, due to its reliance on detailed statistical analyses of court data, as somewhat narrowly focused.⁷ King's research on juvenile delinquency provided data about the prosecution and punishment of young people who came before the courts, as well as changing attitudes and perceptions about them, is again heavily reliant on court material and neglects to utilise the press as a source of information not only concerning those youths who did *not* come before the courts and their supposedly 'criminal' behaviour, but also ignored newspapers as an agency that both helped to create the 'problem of juvenile delinquency' and reflected societal fears about it.⁸ This thesis has provided a detailed quantitative and qualitative study of two felonies' representation in the press, thus seeking to utilise both methodologies in a unique and creative way. It sought to understand the social realities of

⁵ DS Nash and A-M Kilday, 'Introduction', in A-M Kilday and D Nash (eds), *Law, Crime and Deviance Since 1700. Micro-Histories in the History of Crime* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

⁶ GR Elton, *Star Chamber Stories* (London: Methuen, 1958), p 9 cited by Nash and Kilday, *op cit*.

⁷ JM Beattie, *Crime and the Courts in England, 1660-1800* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986); *idem.*, *Policing and Punishment in London, 1660-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); P King, *Crime, Justice and Discretion in England, 1740-1820* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); *ibid.*, *Crime and Law in England, 1750-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁸ P King and J Noel, 'The Origins of "The Problem of Juvenile Delinquency": The Growth of Juvenile Prosecutions in London in the Late Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth- Centuries', *Criminal Justice History*, 14, (1993), 17-41; *idem.*, 'The rise of juvenile delinquency in England, 1780-1840: changing patterns of perception and prosecution', in King, *Crime and Law in England*, pp 73-113; 'The punishment of juvenile offenders in the English courts, 1780-1830. Changing attitudes and policies', in *ibid.*, pp 114-141.

offending – how crimes occurred, how victims experienced those offences and how the press chose to represent robbery and burglary and the likely impact this had upon readers.

Robbery, especially, and burglary too, were well represented in eighteenth-century newspapers. Mid-century, Ward found that around half of all crime reports were of highway or street robberies, and at the end of the century King found that 52% of victim reports were for robbery and a further 19% for burglary.⁹ Such concentration on serious violent offences provided readers with a hugely distorted image of crime, especially in London, when it is compared to the range and number of prosecutions and convictions in the courts. This reflects the seriousness of these two felonies for contemporaries: between 1730 and 1789 between 61% and 81% of all executions of Old Bailey convicts were for robbery and burglary offences.¹⁰ Because of the 'dark' figure of unknown crimes, it is impossible to determine the 'real' level of offending, but misdemeanours and other petty crimes were much more likely to be more widespread than either robbery or burglary. Although reports of highway and street robberies account for more than 50% of crime reportage both mid and late century, they comprised only 8% of the crimes tried at the Old Bailey in the years 1747-1755 and 6% in the later period.¹¹ This finding agrees with Beattie's research, who argued that indictments at the Surrey assizes were so few that only limited conclusions can be made about short-term fluctuations in them.¹² Whilst not providing an accurate guide to the 'real' level of offending, it is argued in this thesis that victim reports in newspapers provide a more realistic indicator of the extent and character of criminality in the capital than indictments are able to do. Despite the gaps in our knowledge, through the publication of unsolved crime reports we have information about many more robberies and burglaries than if we relied upon official sources exclusively.

Were these accounts accurate and reliable? The basic questions of the criminal justice historian revolve around the terms 'who', 'what', 'where', 'when' and 'why', i.e. the basic data needed to reconstruct a specific criminal incident? Furthermore were the reported robberies and burglaries representative or typical of the majority of those crimes? Since crime reports (especially victim accounts) tended to be brief and content analysis shows that there is rarely sufficient data to reconstruct a crime in its entirety, even making

⁹ Ward, *Print Culture*, p 207; P King, 'Newspaper reporting and attitudes to crime and justice in late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century London', *Continuity and Change* 22 (1), (2007), 73-112 (88).

¹⁰ S Devereaux, 'From Sessions to Newspaper? Criminal Trial Reporting, the Nature of Crime, and the London Press, 1770-1800', *The London Journal*, 32 (1), (2007), 1-27 (12).

¹¹ Ward, *Print Culture*, p 208; King, 'Newspaper reporting and attitudes to crime and justice'.

¹² JM Beattie, *Crime and the Courts in England, 1660-1800* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p 158.

allowance for the absence of information about the assailant. In chapter two it was noted that in the 1780s one half of robbery reports comprised only a few sentences, and only nine accounts were over half a column (approximately ten lines) long. Descriptions of crimes often have basic details missing. We know, for example, the names of on average only 42% of victims in the 1780s and 67% in the early nineteenth century from the sampled newspapers. Surprisingly the location of burglaries is provided, on average, in less than ¾ of reportage in the 1780s and in 82% in the early 1800s. Where two or more newspapers report the same offence, it is sometimes possible to fill in the salient gaps, although the extent of plagiarism, especially in the 1780s, often makes this impossible. The likely impact upon readers of many short accounts with some crucial facts omitted is difficult to estimate. For Snell, brief reports made crimes seem less understandable and therefore more frightening to readers. On the other hand, Walpole was convinced that a great deal of what he read in the papers was 'lies', and the absence of confirmatory evidence in an account of a crime may have encouraged others to think likewise.

It is argued here that victim- based testimony accounts in particular are our best source of knowledge of a criminal incident independent of the interpretative bias of official records, and are the largest single category of reportage in both the 1780s and the early nineteenth century sampled newspapers, comprising nearly 50% of all robbery reports in the 1780s and one third in the early 1800s. Victim reports are based upon the direct contribution of the victim (or occasionally a witness), unhindered by the requirements of the law. Lacking legal precision, they nevertheless were made very close in time to the offence when it was still freshest in the victim's mind, often appearing in the next day's paper. Although mediated by a news writer and editor, the descriptions given of the crime and their assailants are likely to be close to the victim's own words, and remain convincingly realistic to the reader. However the evidence was one-sided not given under oath and this may have encouraged doubts in some reader's minds about its veracity.

Data obtained from victim reports it has been shown can be helpful in ascertaining common trends in offending. Newspaper evidence shows, for example, that the polite and 'gentlemanly' highway robber was (almost) extinct by the 1780s, confirming Shoemaker's hypothesis about changing perceptions of highwaymen.¹³ The total absence of mounted highwaymen from the early nineteenth-century sample of newspapers confirms the

¹³ R Shoemaker, 'The Street Robber and the Gentleman Highwayman: Changing Representations and Perceptions of Robbery in London, 1690-1800', *Cultural and Social History*, 3, (2006), 381-405.

accepted understanding that the felony was almost obsolete by this time.¹⁴ This is the first study to consider street robbery in detail. Footpad robbery was presented as a more common risk to Londoners than highway robbery: in the 1780s, there were 152 incidents and 232 accounts of highway robbery in the sample, but 267 incidents and 359 descriptions of footpad robberies. Hustling reports are also fairly common in early nineteenth century reportage. The evidence provided by newspapers here challenges the accepted view that footpad robberies were always violent and brutal: in the 1780s, 60% of street robberies were not straightforward hit-and-run affairs. This is an aspect of street robbery which has been overlooked by writers such as King and McLynn, who have stressed their spontaneous and violent nature.¹⁵ Although frequently opportunistic, they could involve some forethought and planning. In the early 1800s, papers presented 'hustling' as a form of street robbery which often involved simple jostling, although other forms of street robbery had become more violent. It is possible that the street robber was not necessarily as feared as historians have thought.

In the early nineteenth century, judging by press reports, burglary was becoming as significant a problem for Londoners as robbery. In the 1780s street robbery reports were considerably numerically greater for robbery than they were for burglary, but by the beginning of the new century burglary accounts were slightly higher than those for street robbery. The proportionate increase in reports for burglaries over robberies may indicate a genuine reduction in the number of incidents of robbery: improvements in policing and the changing urban fabric of London had successfully eliminated mounted highway robbery from the capital by the early nineteenth century. Changes in the built-environment – greater urbanisation – only provided greater opportunities for burglars. Beattie argues that patterns of prosecution do not indicate a chronology for this change because there were so few indictments.¹⁶ However the thesis suggests that the changing proportion of accounts for robbery and burglary appearing in the London press probably dates the change as occurring between 1790 and the early 1800s. Burglary and housebreaking could be much more profitable than robbery, mounted or otherwise. Only a few people carried large sums of cash and robbers were not able to carry off large items, but this was not such a problem for burglars.

¹⁴ J Sharpe, *Dick Turpin. The Myth of the English Highwayman* (London: Profile Books, 2004).

¹⁵ See for example P King, 'Newspaper reporting and attitudes to crime and justice', 92-3; F McLynn, *Crime and Punishment in Eighteenth-century England* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), pp 59-60; JM Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, pp 150 ff.

¹⁶ Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, p 161.

Newspaper evidence suggests, it is argued, that the better-off were the principal targets of both robbers and burglars, perhaps owing to the fact that the poor had little worth stealing. In the 1780s, for example, only 3% of victims of burglary can be identified as unskilled or semi-skilled workers, whereas 64% were professionals, shopkeepers or merchants and industrialists. Although robbers seem to have been more indiscriminate, a very high proportion of reports nevertheless mention well-off robbery victims. It may have been the case, as Nicholas Rogers noted of the period 1748-1753 that robbers preferred 'to steal from the propertied and well-heeled rather than the poor, out of compassion as well as expediency'.¹⁷ Victim reports, by their very nature, give us very little detail about offenders other than occasionally a reference to their appearance. The implication, however, was that they were usually poor, and this was more strongly implied in the early nineteenth-century sample. Particular groups of people were viewed as disproportionately inclined to crime, including children of the poor, male juveniles and errant servants of both genders. Evidence was provided, once again more explicitly in the later sample, that criminals operated in gangs and there was the alarming suggestion that a criminal 'class' and 'underworld' existed comprised mainly of the poor. The representation of the felonies of highway robbery and burglary followed accepted conventions, attributing thefts to an uncertain aetiology, but most likely one of economic need or greed. The absence of a direct motive would, according to Snell, make crime seem meaningless and, therefore, all the more frightening.¹⁸ The thesis found that newspapers reflected and reinforced commonly understood and accepted patterns of gender offending, where males were more assertive and violent in their criminality than females, who were shown principally as accessories or using subterfuge to steal. The press stressed London as a city of danger for residents and a place of opportunity for robbers and burglars who were becoming not only proficient but also professional.

Peter King has reminded us that crime news is never simply collected or discovered – it is 'manufactured'. He states that 'by selecting certain items from the vast number of potentially newsworthy materials available, those responsible for the editing process assemble a final product which, though it is dependent for its existence on the availability of suitable raw materials, does not inevitably – or even usually – reflect with any accuracy

¹⁷ N Rogers, *Mayhem. Post-War Crime and Violence in Britain, 1748-53* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012), p 43.

¹⁸ Snell, 'Discourses of Criminality', 31.

the range or nature of those materials'.¹⁹ So what factors shaped newspaper reporting of crime? Determining eighteenth-century editorial selection and editorial practices are difficult since, as historians, we have no access to a newsroom. Clearly a number of influences were at play, not least the actions of editors, authors and publishers. Since newspapers were a commercial product designed to make a profit, it is claimed that editors and publishers constructed their crime news according to notions of perceived reader interests and 'newsworthiness'. Perceived reader interest may help to explain the dominant role that robbery and burglary and other serious crimes played in the press in our period. King's study of Old Bailey trial reporting in late eighteenth-century newspapers shows that crimes that were likely, or actually resulted in, attracting the death sentence, were most likely to be reported'.²⁰ The thesis argued that other factors influenced editors too: the level of violence displayed in the criminal act – the more force that was used by an assailant, the more likely it was to be reported; humour or coincidence, the value of what was stolen and the social status of the victim. There was also a strong bias to reporting crimes in the metropolis: no doubt they were easier to obtain, but also the London dailies' market was predominantly London based. Criminal justice officials were also probably able to influence which stories were published through supplying editors with information on specific crimes, and the withholding of information could be used as a form of discipline to editors who did not toe the line. However some crime stories were undoubtedly included as 'fillers': a ready source which could be used to fill an embarrassing gap in a paper. For these reasons, stories about burglary and robbery in the press may not be fully representative of those felonies. It is claimed by King and Snell that newspaper reportage was 'multi-vocal', 'chaotic' and would have presented a confused message to readers. However, the thesis argued to the contrary that the manifest image provided by these reports was a singularly negative one, tempered by the message that the criminal justice system was fair and mostly competent to deal with the situation.

In the 1780s, the press more or less chronicled the everyday incidents of burglary and robbery, making robbery a key crime problem. In the early nineteenth century, however, it is argued that the greater resources and professionalism of the press enabled it to focus upon several identifiable 'themes'. These were the problem of errant servants and employees, juvenile crime, child offenders, burglary, gangs of professional criminals,

¹⁹ P King, 'Making Crime News: Newspapers, Violent Crime and the Selective Reporting of Old Bailey Trials in the Late Eighteenth Century', *Crime, Histoire et Sociétés/Crime, History and Societies* 13, (2009), 93.

²⁰ Ibid.

hustling and the existence of a criminal class and underworld. This was a frightening message, especially to the propertied and respectable classes. The extent to which these problems were 'real' or simply social constructions by newspapers is debatable. They were presented as new, yet examples of hustling can be dated back to the 1780s and criminal children had been identified as a problem in Tudor times. King's observations on the existence of gangs may well apply to other criminal phenomena identified by the press. King hypothesised that 'reports of "gangs infesting" a particular neighbourhood may have been grounded more in the local community's fears and stereotypes or in newspapers' needs to increase their circulation than in observed reality'.²¹

In what ways were the press able to get this message to its readers? It was not just the content of the reports that was disconcerting: the method of presentation was as well. Newspapers, the thesis has argued, although multi-authored, 'spoke' with a single voice that carried a degree of authority. Furthermore, there was a density to the presentation: reports would appear in clusters, often on the same page, thereby exaggerating their impact. This would give the impression that crime was endemic and normative. It would also suggest to readers that the criminal justice system was failing: neither the deterrent of capital punishment or existing policing methods were working. The low number of execution reports would also remind readers that justice was not being done. At the time this did not lead to demands for wholesale reform of the capital code or new systems of policing but it may have made the passage of the Middlesex Justices Act easier after the previous Police Bill had failed. The press suggested that the existing police should function more efficiently or there should be reform and improvements to the existing system. But developments in press reportage about crime and justice helped to change the perception of crime itself. Newspaper readers came to believe that burglars, robbers and other offenders were not 'respectable' upstanding people like themselves.²² Notions of limitless human depravity became increasingly class-bound and restricted to the lower classes. As Gatrell has argued, 'crime' took on an abstract and collective quality, making it look like an acute social 'problem' urgently in need of a solution, rather than one of the normal risks of daily life.²³ Furthermore, whereas justice had previously been seen as ultimately belonging to God, the role of Man was emphasised more and more.

²¹ P King, *Crime, Justice, and Discretion in England, 1740-1820* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p 215.

²² Devereaux, 'From Sessions to Newspaper?', 12-13.

²³ VAC Gatrell, 'Crime, authority and the policeman-state', in FML Thompson, *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750-1950: Social Agencies and Institutions*, 3 vols., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), vol.3, pp 243-310.

Propertied Londoners of the late eighteenth century would have gained a great deal of their information about crime and justice issues from newspapers, but how did they receive the printed message? It is extremely difficult to measure how individual readers (or even classes of readers) received newspapers, but certain generalisations can be put forward. With the introduction of print, it has been suggested, a new method of reading developed: it was more private, freer and totally internalised.²⁴ Furthermore, 'newspapers also helped to restructure a reader's sense of time and space, creating an impression of engagement with a wider continuous drama of "public" events'.²⁵ Whilst it has to be accepted in principle that a text can never fully define a reader's response to it, which can be highly individual and personal, it is argued in the thesis that crime reports carried a simple, overarching message – that crime was normative, endemic and a serious problem – which, at root, could only be accepted or rejected. Modern studies have shown that readers' perceptions of violent crime are heavily influenced by reading about it in the press, and the propensity to moral panics is adequate confirmation of this.²⁶ Thus it can be said that the press is a 'constructor of social reality for its readers' and it 'presents a particular form of reality to its readership'.²⁷

The representation of robbery, burglary and other serious crimes as relentlessly high, often violent, and as a serious and growing problem in our period, when combined with high levels of conviction at the Old Bailey from 1767 onwards, 'denied readers of the London press any further possibility of believing [...] that becoming a victim of theft – often theft with violence – was a sufficiently remote possibility that unregenerate criminals could any longer be viewed as figures of fun, much less as people essentially akin to the law-abiding reader him – or herself'.²⁸ Thus the press lost its reconciling and integrative function that earlier publications had had.²⁹ This message was designed to appeal to the emerging middle-class sensibility: the same middling, urban, professional and respectable classes

²⁴ R Chartier, 'Introduction', in R Chartier, (ed), *The Culture of Print. Power and the Uses of Print in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), pp 1-10 (p 2).

²⁵ H Barker and S Burrows, 'Introduction', in H Barker and S Burrows, (eds), *Press, Politics and the Public Sphere in Europe and North America, 1760-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp 1-22 (p 4).

²⁶ P Williams and J Dickinson, 'Fear of Crime: Read all about it? The Relationship between Newspapers Crime Reporting and Fear of Crime', *British Journal of Criminology*, 33 (1993), 33-56.

²⁷ V Berridge, 'Content Analysis and Historical Research in Newspapers', in M Harris and A Lee (eds), *The Press in English Society from the Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries* (London and Toronto: Associated Universities Press, 1986), pp 201-218 (pp 206; 207).

²⁸ Devereaux, 'From Sessions to Newspaper', 14.

²⁹ LB Faller, *Turned to Account. The forms and functions of criminal biography in late seventeenth- and early nineteenth-century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

who were the principal purchasers of newspapers, and who assumed a social and moral differentiation from the London poor. Nevertheless, although Snell claims that no other source had previously published the failings of the justice system so frequently, there were positive messages too about crime, policing and the judicial system contained in the pages of the newspaper. David Lemmings suggests that such negative interpretations ‘may over-represent one side of the very complex engagement between print culture and crime by neglecting the deliberate construction of counter-opinion around legitimate authority’.³⁰ Ward has pointed to the more reassuring, positive images of justice presented in mid-century newspapers: arrests by Bow Street runners and others, interrogations by justices, trial reports and convictions, and this finding is supported by this thesis for the period 1780 to 1830.³¹ Thus the predominant image was ‘that while crime appeared to be a serious and threatening social problem, the criminal justice system was to some extent capable of dealing with the threat’.³²

David Lemmings has argued that criminal trial reportage in the eighteenth century press was ‘a selective and emotional discourse of government, that operated by resolving threats to collective identity, thereby legitimising authority’.³³ It is the contention of this thesis that victim reports and other crime and justice reportage in newspapers served a similar function in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In a non-democratic state marked by huge economic and social disparities, the state needed a mandate to govern. Victim reports, by highlighting the large number of apparently unsolved crimes in the capital and elsewhere, emphasised the need for strong government action to deal with the problem. Other forms of reportage – arrests, justices’ examinations, trial reports with convictions – functioned to show that the state could and would take appropriate action. This provided the state with a ‘narrative of authority’.³⁴ The narrative was especially important, it is suggested, to the respectable and better-off classes – the principal purchasers of newspapers. Designed to appeal to that social group, the press highlighted

³⁰ D Lemmings, ‘Henry Fielding and English Crime and Justice Reportage, 1748-52: Narratives of Panic, Authority, and Emotion’, *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 80 (1), (2017), 71-97 (74).

³¹ Ward, *Print Culture*, 209.

³² Ibid. Cf Shoemaker’s comment: ‘the common theme [in newspaper reports] was that crime was a frequent occurrence – and it demanded, and sometimes received, decisive action from law enforcement officials [...] and the courts’, Shoemaker, ‘Print Culture’, p 9.

³³ D Lemmings, ‘Negotiating Justice in the New Public Sphere: Crime, the Courts and the Press in Early Eighteenth-Century Britain’, in D Lemmings, (ed), *Crime, Courtrooms and the Public Sphere in Britain, 1700-1850* (Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), pp 119-145 (p 120).

³⁴ A narrative is ‘an account of a series of events, facts, etc. given in order and with the establishing of connections between them’. (*Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*).

the dangers facing the polite from robbers and burglars. Burglary reports in particular threatened the private peace, prosperity and domesticity of the middle – classes, especially from their errant servants and employees. Through the agency of the press, the urban poor were singled out as the main threat to the ideology of domesticated family life. London especially was presented by the press as a breeding ground for criminals, a place where the ordinary people were to some extent freed from the social discipline of a face-to-face society, tempted by the prospects of wealth and luxury. By the 1780s the problem seemed acute; in the early nineteenth century it appeared chronic. Newspapers increasingly encouraged their middle-class readers to morally judge the poor as a ‘criminal class’, unrespectable, alien and ‘other’. They became a social ‘problem’ in need of a ‘solution’. The press, as we saw in chapter four, provided the raw evidence that this was so, and this again helped to provide a narrative of authority justifying the state’s increasing powers over the less fortunate classes.

However the raw exercise of power was not enough by itself, and so a ‘narrative of public justice’ was also required. Henry and John Fielding and the authorities of the City of London (who controlled publication of the Old Bailey *Proceedings*) recognised this. The notion of ‘public justice’ showed that justice was being carried out fairly, legitimately and in the public’s interest (although in reality it was the interests of the elite and the better-off that were served).³⁵ The press carried the stories and commentary that supported, not criticised, the state’s pretensions at claiming public legitimacy with its accounts of the successes and failures of criminal justice in the 1780s and early 1800s. This was more pronounced in early nineteenth-century reportage than it had been in the 1780s because, as noted in chapter four, newspapers increased the number of reports of official justices’ examinations and trial accounts whilst reducing the number of victim reports. Whereas victim reports had made up roughly 50% of reportage in the 1780s, by the early 1800s trial reports made up 40% of reportage for burglary and examination accounts for robbery now made up 37% of reportage. This increase in reportage from official sources at the expense of unofficial victim reports meant that the voice of the victim was heard less, further strengthening the narratives of public justice and authority. Our period was an era of crisis

³⁵ On Henry Fielding see D Lemming, ‘Henry Fielding and English Crime and Justice Reportage’; on John Fielding, JM Beattie, ‘Sir John Fielding and Public Justice: The Bow Street Magistrate’s Court, 1750-1780’, *Law and History Review*, 25 (1), (2007), 61-100; on the *Proceedings*, S Devereaux, ‘The City and the Sessions Paper: “Public Justice” in London, 1770-1800’, *Journal of British Studies*, 35 (4), (1996), 466-503.

for the English state. Starting with the Gordon Riots in 1780, and punctuated by the impact of the French Revolution, the Revolutionary Wars, political agitation, social and economic radicalism, a largely uncritical press supported the state and its criminal justice policies together with the interests of the propertied.

There remain certain areas of crime print culture that require further research. For example, did the provincial press also adopt narratives of authority and public justice or was it more independent minded? Press reportage of offences other than burglary and robbery such as assault, homicide and riot, which also threatened the king's peace but were not property offences, may have elicited different responses from the press. Did different crimes elicit different responses from newspapers? Furthermore is it possible to establish any links between the press and law and policy makers? Were newspapers regularly cited in parliament in support of (or in opposition to) certain criminal justice measures? Thus this is still an ongoing and important research field with opportunities to refine and develop the ideas developed in this thesis.

This study has shown therefore the importance of the press as an important source for historians of crime and justice. They not only supplement other official documents, but collectively they offer evidence of crimes that we would otherwise have been ignorant about. Crucially they can offer the victim's perspective on crime. Whilst press reports are not an accurate guide to the 'real' incidence of crime, they reflect the nature of much violent property theft. News stories though were carefully selected and edited in terms of their newsworthiness. In the early nineteenth century the press started to identify themes in its crime reportage such as the existence of a criminal class and underworld. In doing so it exaggerated the involvement of the poor in criminality. Throughout this period, which began with the Gordon Riots and ended with the creation of the Metropolitan Police, the press was a useful ally to the state in creating narratives of authority and public justice, supporting the state's legitimacy in dealing with the forces of crime and disorder. It also echoed the state's movement from the crime-crisis years of the 1780s to the more authoritarian stance of the government of the 1820s through its regular reproduction of 'official' sources such as magistrates' interrogations and trial reports at the expense of victim reports. This was a story of a transition from crime and disorder towards greater public order.

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